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Buddhist Television in Taiwan: Adopting Modern Mass Media Technologies for Dharma Propagation

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by

An Quoc Pham

Committee in charge:

Professor Mayfair Yang, Chair

Professor Fabio Rambelli

Professor Vesna Wallace

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The dissertation of An Quoc Pham is approved.

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Fabio Rambelli

_____

Vesna Wallace

_____

Mayfair Yang, Committee Chair

August 2017

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VITA OF AN QUOC PHAM
August 2017

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts in East Asian Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, December 1996

Master of Arts in Asian Studies, California State University, Long Beach, May 2008

Doctor of Philosophy in East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, September 2017 (expected)

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

1999-2017: Substitute Teacher, Torrance Unified School District, Torrance, CA

2001-2002: US and World History Teacher, West High School, Torrance, CA

2008-2009: Japanese Language Teacher, North High School, Torrance, CA

2010-2017: Teaching Assistant, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Summer 2017: Teaching Associate, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

AWARDS

Graduate Dean's Advancement Fellowship	June 2014
Taiwan Ministry of Education Short Term Research Award	April – September 2014
Humanities and Social Sciences Research Grant	May 2013
Taiwan Ministry of Education Huayu Enrichment Scholarship	April 2013

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Buddhist Studies

Studies in Religion and Media with Professor Mayfair Yang

Studies in Buddhist Studies with Professor Fabio Rambelli

Studies in Religious History and Geography with Professor Vesna Wallace

ABSTRACT

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With the advent of television in the twentieth century, religious institutions found a new medium with which to use in proselytizing and disseminating religious messages. Adapting the use of the new medium to religious communication has meant adopting broadcast strategies that change the way preachers engage audiences and the way audiences receive religious messages. These broadcast strategies, which are a combination of methods established by secular broadcasting and methods unique to the Buddhist broadcast stations, offer audiences an alternative to established commercial television. Beyond merely serving as a means of entertainment, Buddhist television programs contain ethical messages of morality based on Buddhist tenets that attempt to influence how viewers see and live their lives. In Taiwan, several Buddhist organizations have used the television medium for religious broadcast purposes since the government lifted martial law in 1987. This technological progression in the use of new mediums of communication is taken for granted, but it raises questions of whether technologies like television simply help to spread the same Buddhist messages that have been expounded for generations, or whether the medium and the way in which it is used changes fundamental aspects of how the message is delivered and received. I argue that while the adoption of television and established television program

formats by Buddhist institutions in Taiwan follows a long tradition of Chinese Buddhist adoptions of mass media and popular culture, the usage of television changes the very practice of religion through the televised delivery and reception of the Buddhist teachings as well as through televised ritual ceremonies. Taiwan's Buddhist television channels can be accessed around the world by satellite television and by Internet video streams. The ability to easily access these monastic broadcasts allows for viewers to discuss and comment on the words of Buddhist monks and nuns in new ways that were impossible before technological mediation. My research focuses on both sides of the television – the side of television producers, who negotiate the use of established commercial program formats to conform to Buddhist values, and the side of the television viewers, whose viewing of Buddhist television changes the way religion is received and practiced.

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Introduction

The usage of technological media to preserve and propagate religious teachings is a firmly established practice within the history of Chinese Buddhism. The world's earliest extant dated and printed book is a Chinese woodblock print of the *Diamond Sutra* dated to 868 C.E., considered one of the most important texts in Mahayana Buddhism. After Bi Sheng (畢昇 970-1051 C.E.) invented movable type printing at some point around the eleventh century C.E., within fifty years of his invention, Buddhist sutras were then printed using movable type as well, with the earliest extant sample of a Buddhist scripture in movable type being a Pure Land scripture, the *Sutra of the Buddha Gazing at Infinite Life Spoken by the Buddha* 佛說觀無量壽佛經, dated to 1103 C.E. In the modern era, in Taiwan, this practice of adopting the usage of mass media technology has continued with the usage of television and the Internet for propagation purposes. Chinese Buddhists in Taiwan have been able to use television to broadcast sermons and Buddhist ritual ceremonies because of the legal freedoms that came about after the lifting of martial law in 1987 and the enacting of the Cable Television Law that allowed private entities to own and operate cable television stations in 1993. From the mid-1990s onwards, Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, unlike in mainland China, have been able to use television as a means of Dharma propagation.

How is the Buddhist adoption of the use of television different from the adoption of pre-modern forms of propagating teachings? This is one question that arises concerning Buddhist television and a partial answer relates to what Marshal McLuhan has written on the advent of television in the very title of his first chapter in *Understanding Media* that "The Medium is the Message." His meaning was to say that the very medium of television changed the ways that the message creators had to operate in order to get their message

across to receptive audiences. And audiences, themselves, changed the ways in which they listened to and interacted with these messages because of the change in medium. In differentiating television from former communication media, he stated that "TV will not work as background. It engages you. You have to be with it."[1] This, he argued, was different from radio, which could be turned on as a background sound while listeners did other things. Adapting the use of television to Buddhist propagation has meant adopting broadcast strategies that change the way preachers engage audiences and the way audiences receive religious messages. These broadcast strategies, which are a combination of methods established by secular broadcasting and methods unique to the Buddhist broadcast stations, offer audiences an alternative to established commercial television. This dissertation examines that adoption of the television medium by Taiwanese Buddhist institutions with a study of the sides of Buddhist television production as well as television reception.

The reason studying the reception of Buddhist television is important has to do with what McLuhan has written regarding TV changing our sense-lives, our mental processes and emphasizing participation and dialogue. As a small example of how TV changed people's mental processes, McLuhan wrote that people were no longer satisfied with simply having a book knowledge of French but would rather make a new suggestion, "Let's talk French."[2] This change comes about because the medium of television through which French can be learned influences viewers towards the action of speaking French together with a televised French speaker, rather than the silent intake of French lessons through a book. There is a participatory aspect of television for viewers with the visual and audio elements that

[1] Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 22.

[2] McLuhan, 289.

previous media did not have. One main goal of this dissertation is to answer the following questions. How does watching Buddhist television change the way believers practice Buddhism? Does the watching of Buddhist television include any aspect of participation and dialogue that changes the relationship between monastic speaker and faithful adherents?

While religious use of television in the form of American Christian television has been studied extensively by scholars such as Stewart Hoover and Peter Horsfield, there have been very few works that focus on Chinese Buddhist television. Works that do include discussion of Buddhist television in general usually do so only as a part of a summary on the activities and achievements of a Buddhist organization or institution without going into detail on the effects of Buddhist television in relation to its viewers. For example, in Mahinda Deegalle's work on the popularization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Deegalle's discussion of Buddhist television in Sri Lanka covers three pages, describing the types of broadcasting that monks use, writing of Buddhist television usage as a modern innovation.[3] There is no in-depth study of how viewers receive the television programs. In Mark A. Nathan's dissertation on Buddhist propagation and modernization in twentieth century Korean Buddhism, Nathan describes the 1995 establishment of the first Korean cable television station and the 1990 establishment of a Korean Buddhist radio station as "the first Buddhist broadcasting stations in the world" without going into details on the history of the station's formation, the content or types of programming, or information regarding audience reception.[4]

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[3] Mahinda Deegalle, *Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 166-168.

[4] Mark A. Nathan, "Buddhist Propagation and Modernization: The Significance of P'ogyo in Twentieth-Century Korean Buddhism" PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2010, 215.

Concerning modern Chinese Buddhism, Francesca Tarocco describes a modern Buddhist material culture through Buddhist Internet websites that have the potential to change the religious experience for adherents. She writes, "There are several examples of Internet-based versions of traditional ritual practices. For instance, it is now possible to purchase virtual votive candles…or donate money to have a manuscript digitalized for the International Dunhuang Project at the British Library and then transfer the merit for the act to one's parents…"[5] She agrees that modern technology may affect the way in which Buddhism is learned, transmitted, and practiced, but her research does not focus on these transformative aspects or on the role of Buddhist television in changing practices. She instead focuses on Buddhist music from Shanghai in the 1930s, modern print media, and digital Buddhist music used for Buddhist propagation in the 1980s by the Taiwanese Buddhist organization, Fo Guang Shan.[6] Tarocco's focus is on the cultural production and the cultural practices associated with venerating modern Buddhist material goods such as Buddhist CDs. Her work has not dealt with examining how the act of listening to a ritual CD changes the act of prayer or the relationship between monastic leaders and lay practitioners.

In books specifically about two of Taiwan's largest Buddhist organizations, Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan, brief mention is made about how each organization has a television station, but these works do not focus on the Buddhist station or on how viewers react to the programs. In Stewart Chandler's study of Fo Guang Shan, Chandler mention's Fo Guang Shan's television station only briefly in several instances to acknowledge that the Buddhist

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[5] Francesca Tarocco, "On the market: consumption and material culture in modern Chinese Buddhism," *Religion*, 41:4, Dec 2011, 639, DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2011.624698.

[6] See Francesca Tarocco, *The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhism: Attuning the Dharma* (London: Routledge, 2007).

organization has established a satellite television station, but he does not go into details on the station's programs or the station's viewership.[7] In Julia Huang's *Charisma and Compassion: Cheng Yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Movement*, Huang focuses on the charisma aspect of the leader, Cheng Yen, as a driving force for the Tzu Chi organization, only briefly mentioning Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV station five times in passing throughout her book.[8] Mark O'Neill's *Tzu Chi: Serving with Compassion* comes the closest to focusing on broader aspects of a Buddhist television channel in dedicating one chapter titled "Media" to discuss the founding of Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV as well as its goals and programs. However, the chapter focuses only on the production side of Da Ai TV and has little material concerning the station's reception other than one sentence that states Da Ai TV ranks sixth in Taiwan.[9] In *Telemodernities: Television and Transforming Lives in Asia*, the authors Tania Lewis, Fran Martin, and Wanning Sun include a section on Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV describing the station, its goals, and a few of its programs. They conclude that the station propounds Tzu Chi's Buddhist moral ideals and rational-ethical belief system to influence viewers away from certain human habits in late modernity such as "overconsumption, environmental destruction, inequitable social relations, and callous individualism."[10] However, like the works mentioned above, the authors do not include a reception side to the discussion.

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[7] Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 21, 22, 24, 48, 127, 133, 135, 232.

[8] Julia Huang, *Charisma and Compassion: Cheng Yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1, 6, 32, 137, 305.

[9] Mark O'Neill, *Tzu Chi: Serving with Compassion* (Singapore: Wiley, 2010), 61.

[10] Tania Lewis, Fran Martin, and Wanning Sun, *Telemodernities: Television and Transforming Lives in Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 194.

In the most the recent work to come out at the time of the writing of this introduction, *Religion and Media in China: Insights and Case Studies from the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, Stefania Travagnin writes two chapters that have some relation to Taiwanese Buddhist television in her focus on religious media in Taiwan and the use of cartoons and documentaries. While Travagnin does not focus on the reception side of Taiwanese Buddhist television, she lays out the steps of progression through which Taiwanese Buddhist institutions came to adopt the use of television and she makes a comment on those developmental steps relevant to this study:

> Each of these steps meant a change in the agency and actors involved… Each of these steps also redefined the religious and the media aspects of the products, and each of these steps contributed to turning the religious media into an alternative voice in the religious landscape, creating an extra polarity reference point for the believers, and producing an alternative venue of congregation. Media cybervenues, in fact, have also become a platform where believers created virtual communities and arenas for social discussion.[11]

While Travagnin's work only makes small mention of the believers who create virtual communities, this dissertation will take an in-depth look into communities of Buddhist television viewers. Where Travagnin writes of the media steps changing the agency and actors of production, redefining the media aspects of the products, this dissertation will also include the changes involved for the receivers of these products, the television viewers, and examine the arenas of social discussion.

The one aspect that has not been taken into consideration by the works describe above in dealing with Taiwanese Buddhist television is the aspect of how viewing Buddhist television has changed or added to the way Buddhist adherents can now receive the Buddhist teachings. In a discussion of Buddhist television, a study of the reception side of television is

just as important as the study of the production side, since it cannot be assumed that viewers will always receive the message of the broadcast as the producers intend or that all viewers will receive the messages in the same way. This is made clear by Stuart Hall whose theory on media reception included three different possibilities on how viewers might receive the message of a television broadcast. They can see the broadcast and understand the message as the producers intend, or they can negotiate the meaning of the message based on the viewers' local circumstances, or they can decode the message in a completely contrary way from its intended purpose.[12]

The act of listening to a religious speaker live greatly differs from listening to the speaker as mediated though a technological medium. Religious adherents can engage in discussion in public spaces and debate against the message of the religious speaker as a result of hearing the speaker mediated through modern technology rather than hearing the speaker directly. This has been a topic of research for Charles Hirschkind who studied Egyptian Muslim listeners of Muslim audio cassette tapes which allowed for Muslims to debate on and critique the meaning of the religious teachings – something they could never do if sitting directly before the authority of the religious speaker in a mosque setting. Buddhist television programs watched by communities of Buddhist viewers create this potential for critique in what Charles Hirschkind has identified as a 'counterpublic' because the audience does not sit directly in front of the monastic speaker, creating an opportunity for critical debate. Whether this is something that Buddhist viewers engage in will be one focus

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[11] Stefania Travagnin, *Religion and Media in China: Insights and Case Studies from the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 61-62.

[12] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" in *Media Studies: A Reader*, eds. Sue Thornham, Caroline Bassett, and Paull Marris (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 36-38.

of this dissertation. Charles Hirschkind's concept of a 'counterpublic' can be seen as a variation or a modern answer to Jürgen Habermas's concept of the 'public sphere' in which citizens gathered in public spaces such as salons before the nineteenth century to debate on topics relevant to their lives in literature, politics, and economics that appeared in the written and print materials of the times and to challenge the government on certain policy issues. For Habermas, critical debate leading to the challenge of governmental policies was an essential part of the public sphere he identified in the eighteenth century European salon gatherings. This dissertation will examine whether critical debate or a variation of Hirschkind's 'counterpublic' also arises because of Buddhist communities watching monastic speakers mediated through televised screens.

In examining the production side of Buddhist television in Taiwan, I differ from the above-mentioned studies by not limiting my focus on only one Buddhist television station, Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV. I introduce all six Buddhist stations to present the different ways in which Taiwanese Buddhist institutions adopt the television medium for their uses in Buddhist propagation. The above works focus on Da Ai TV because it ranks as the most watched Buddhist channel among the six existing Buddhist channels. Tzu Chi, the organization behind Da Ai TV, is one of the three largest Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, together with Fo Guang Shan and Fagushan or Dharma Drum Mountain. However, to focus only on Da Ai TV and ignore the other five Buddhist stations can lead to the assumption that all the Buddhist channels follow the same strategies for television broadcasting, which is not the case. All the Buddhist channels share the goal of propagating the Buddhist teachings but they differ in their broadcasting methods. This shared goal allows the Buddhist institutions to adopt television, but how they differently interpret the rules and the teachings of Buddhism leads to the differences in what they choose to broadcast.

This selective nature in the adoption of a modern technology for religious uses is the focus of Heidi Campbell's *When Religion Meets New Media*. In her work, Campbell sets up an analytical framework for what she identifies as the religious social-shaping of technology that can be used to study how religious communities engage with modern media. In my dissertation, I apply Campbell's framework to the Buddhist adoption of television in Taiwan. The first step of Campbell's framework involves a study of the history and traditions of the religious community in regards to media use to find how religious communities have reacted to different media over time. The second step includes a study of the core beliefs and patterns of the religious community to understand how those beliefs are used and interpreted in the contemporary context that might allow for the adoption and usage of new media. The third step is the investigation of the negotiation process in which a religious community adopts new media technology on its own terms by accepting certain media aspects while rejecting others to conform to the interpretation of the religious beliefs and patterns. The fourth and final step is to consider the communal framing and the discourse that results from the media usage to consider how the adoption of the new technology influences the social sphere of the community and whether changes need to be made because of the influence on the social sphere. In her work, Campbell uses her framework to examine Jewish, Islamic and Christian adoptions of modern media technology, but she writes in her concluding chapter that research still needs to be done especially with Buddhist communities' use of media. This dissertation is a first step in that direction by applying her framework to the case of Buddhist television.

To apply Campbell's framework, my research adopts a multidisciplinary approach in which I first examine samples from the history of Chinese Buddhist practices of propagating teachings to show a precedent of adopting popular culture for Buddhist means. However,

rather than focusing on the adoption of material print media such as woodblock printing or moveable type printing, I examine the strategy of adopting genres of popular culture with story-telling known as miracle tales or *zhiguai* 志怪 and a genre of print in Chinese morality books or *shanshu* 善書. These forms of popular culture were adopted by Buddhists to propagate Buddhist beliefs. This will not be a study of the adoption of print media as a whole, but a study of how particular genres adopted by Buddhists can act as mediums through which Buddhist information is passed in a way that resembles the original non-Buddhist formats of the popular culture genre in question. It is a study of the early strategy of Buddhist content dissemination through the adoption of established mediums of content dissemination. Miracle tales may be better identified as a literary genre rather than a type of media or medium of mass communication, but here I follow Marshal McLuhan in his description of 'medium' in which he states "the "content" of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph."[13] I consider the strange tales and morality books not as media by a definition of mass print media but as mediums through which Buddhist content is inserted to be disseminated in a way that is accepted by people familiar with strange tale and morality book genres. Through words that were written down or printed on paper, the written word is also a medium of communication. Through such examinations, I aim to show that the contemporary Buddhist adoption of television formats, such as dramas and talk shows, follows a pattern of adoption of mediums that has been present since pre-modern times.

[13] McLuhan, 8.

I will also examine how Mahayana Buddhist teachings important within the Chinese Buddhist tradition can be interpreted to allow for the adoption of modern media technology and its usage. This is followed by an ethnographic study of the contemporary practices of media adoption and usage in Taiwan through fieldwork that was conducted in Taiwan in 2013 and 2014. During my fieldwork, I conducted interviews with members of television production from Da Ai TV. I also conducted interviews with and took surveys from television viewers found through formal and informal introductions and through visits to Buddhist events and activities held by Tzu Chi, Fo Guang Shan, and Life TV. In attending such events, I took part as a participant-observer. When asked of my background, I would identify myself as a researcher from the United States studying Buddhist television and as a Buddhist, born in Vietnam, but raised in the United States. In all instances, I was welcomed to participate and invited to future events. In the pages that follow I have changed the names of some of my informants to protect their identity and kept the names of others with their permission or at their request.

In addition to interviews, I watched Buddhist television broadcasts and television programs and examined print media and news about the Buddhist institutions that run the Buddhist television stations. After returning from my fieldwork, I maintained contact with my informants and continued to view Taiwanese Buddhist television programs through websites on the Internet, an act which in itself reflects the changing nature of how television can be viewed. The follow-up conversations that I maintained with my informants via email and Internet Facebook discussion were equally as important as the conversations held during my fieldwork. Discussions held both during and after my fieldwork influenced the conclusions made in this dissertation.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, with the first two chapters following the steps of Heidi Campbell's framework for the religious social-shaping of technology. The first part of Chapter One examines part of the history of the Chinese Buddhist practice of using mediums of popular culture in the form of Chinese strange tales and morality books to show that there was a precedent for the Buddhist adoption of mainstream media for Buddhist purposes. The ways in which the strange tale format was adopted for Buddhist miracle tales set up a precedent for modern Buddhist television to adopt mainstream television formats of dramas, news, and talk shows. The last part of Chapter One follows the second step of Campbell's framework by examining core Buddhist beliefs that would allow for the adoption and use of modern media. Specifically, I examine passages in the *Lotus Sutra*, considered to be the one of the most popular Buddhist sutras in Chinese Buddhist history, looking at passages that can been interpreted to allow for the adoption of different media for the spread of Buddhist teachings.

Chapter Two introduces the production side of Taiwanese Buddhist television. This chapter follows the third step in Campbell's framework by examining the negotiation process of how Taiwanese Buddhist communities adopt the use of television technology based on Buddhist beliefs. The chapter begins with a history and description of each Buddhist channel, followed by an examination of the different types of broadcasting formats used by the Buddhist stations. To examine how a Buddhist television station specifically adopts the use of mainstream broadcasting formats, I highlight Da Ai TV's use of the news program format as a case study to show how Tzu Chi's interpretation of Buddhist teachings influences the way they adapt the news program for their purposes. One problem that arises concerning the traditional practice of television operation is that it is a high cost operation that relies on commercial advertisements for its running and maintenance as well as for

profit. How do Buddhist organizations fund their television operations when they identify themselves as non-profit institutions and refuse to use commercial advertisements? Chapter Two will examine the solutions that the Buddhist stations have come up with to deal with this problem.

In Chapter Three, I examine the reception of Buddhist television in seeing whether the community of viewers can be identified with Habermas's notion of a "public sphere" and seeing whether critical debate plays a role in Buddhist television watching. Because one of the goals of Buddhist television, as with Buddhism in general, is to propagate teachings that help to alleviate people's suffering, there is a potential for the television-watching experience to be a transformative experience. Victor Turner has written of transformative experiences in his studies on rites of passage, in which he identifies two characteristics related to the transformation of an individual through what he defines as liminality and *communitas*. In Chapter Three, I examine the act of Buddhist television watching from this viewpoint to see whether Buddhist television viewers can also be seen as going through a state of liminality and experiencing a sense of community as in Turner's *communitas.* Who watches Buddhist television and why? How do people watch? Do watchers go through a liminal experience or participate in critical debate? Do viewers see themselves as obtaining any benefits from watching Buddhist television? Chapter Three will seek to answer these questions.

In Chapter Four, I look at the ritual aspect of Buddhist television and examine how the broadcast of Buddhist ritual influences the actions of viewers who use the broadcast in their daily prayer routines. Jacques Derrida has written that what separates Christian broadcasts from the broadcast of other religions is that Christian television broadcasts the ritual event live for viewers to participate in at home. I challenge Derrida's position by

examining how the ritual aspect of Buddhist television in Taiwan has been used by Buddhist practitioners. Charles Hirschkind and Purnima Mankekar have both written descriptions of how modern mass media in the form of audio cassettes for Egyptian Muslims and television drama for Indian Hindus have respectively influenced the bodily comportment of the faithful when they listen to the religious media in a pious fashion. Chapter Four seeks to identify a similar occurrence with viewers of Buddhist television in Taiwan.

In Chapter Five, I show how Buddhist television travels beyond the borders of nation and even beyond its own limitations of the television set through social media on the Internet to have a greater influence on media users and international viewers. The virtual spaces of the Internet are also spaces in which viewers can publicly react or respond to Buddhist videos and this has the potential to create a space in which people can have more free and open dialogue than would be possible in a space that is specifically for Buddhist community participants. In recent years, Buddhist institutions have adapted their television programs to Internet video formats on social media by creating social media accounts and posting monastic sermons as video clips that viewers can then watch and comment on. This has led to unintended consequences with the position of monastic speakers being challenged by social media viewers. Chapter Five will examine how the use of the Internet, international branch networks, and satellite television change the way viewers watch Buddhist television and the way viewers identify themselves through global viewing.

In conclusion, my research on the adoption of television usage by Buddhist institutions highlights a topic that is still only beginning to receive attention in Western academia. Buddhist television has now been present in Taiwan for twenty years. That is about the same amount of time that the Internet has been present in our daily lives. However, because the existence of television itself precedes the existence of the Internet by about four

decades, there is a perception that the creation of Buddhist television stations must be something much older than the creation of Buddhist websites when in fact they both arose at about the same time in the 1990s. The study of the usages of Buddhist television in Taiwan is therefore not really a study of an older media adoption, but of a contemporary practice concurrent with practices of the usage of Buddhist Internet web pages. And with the broadcast of Buddhist television channels through the Internet, there is much to be studied in terms of Buddhist uses of modern mass media technology, of which this dissertation serves as one beginning point.

Chapter One

The Precedents for Modern Buddhist Propagation Methods in Chinese Buddhist History

I. Strange Tales and Miracle Tales

According to Heidi Campbell's framework for the religious-social shaping of technology, any study of the religious use of media should start with studying the history and tradition of the religious community in relation to media usage, followed by looking at the core beliefs and patterns to see how those beliefs influence a community towards or against using certain technologies. She writes, "Decisions made regarding texts, as one of the earliest forms of media, often serve as a sort of template for future negotiation with other media."[14] In the context of Taiwanese Buddhist usage of television, how written texts were used by Buddhist communities in pre-modern China serve as the foundation for the later adoption of television by the Chinese Buddhist tradition in Taiwan. More specifically, the Buddhist adoption of established textual formats such as strange tales, miracle tales and morality books that were used to propagate non-Buddhist stories and teachings during the dynastic eras of China serve as the template and precedent for the Buddhist adoption of secular television formats such as the television drama, talk show, and news program in contemporary Taiwan.

The earliest instances of this media adaptation take place within two genres of Chinese literature - *zhiguai* 志怪, or strange tales, and *xiaozi zhuan* 孝子傳, or accounts of filial sons. Texts that can be identified as part of the *zhiguai* genre began to appear during the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 202 CE). Tales within these collections told of strange and out

[14] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (Routledge: London, 2010), 60.

of the ordinary occurrences. Robert Ford Campany counts sixty-four texts that have survived whole or in fragments and seventeen that have been lost, of which he classifies different collections as being composed of descriptions of (1) anomalous deities, flauna, and flora, (2) narratives of the adventures of mythical figures, sages, rulers, shamans, and specialists in the esoteric arts, and (3) anomalous events concerning ordinary human protagonists (low- and middle-ranking members of the elite).[15] Early extant collections of strange tales such as the *Lieyizhuan* 列異傳 (*Arrayed Marvels*) from the mid third century CE and the *Soushenji* 搜神記 (*In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record*) from the early fourth century CE had no Buddhist elements in them.

Tales of filial sons and daughters had been in existence in China since the Warring States period (480-222 BCE), but flourished most during the early medieval period (25-589 CE) when literati composed works called *Xiaozi zhuan*, or "Accounts of Filial Sons," and historians added such accounts to the dynastic histories. The earliest dynastic history to contain accounts of men known for their filial piety was the *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記 (*The Eastern Library Han Records*), which was a compilation of writings by different authors of the first and second century CE. These accounts also contained no Buddhist elements in them.

Buddhist miracle tales and Accounts of Filial Sons

Miracle tales that contained Buddhist content did not start to appear in China until Buddhism started to have a broader influence on the population. An early sign of this broader influence appeared after the monk Dharmaraksa translated the *Lotus Sutra* into

[15] Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 99-100.

Chinese in 286 CE. The earliest extent collection of Buddhist miracle tales, the *Guang shi yin ying yan ji* 光世音應驗記, or "Records of Miracles Concerning Avalokiteśvara" appeared about a century after Dharmaraksa's translation. Written by Fu Liang 傅亮 (374-426), an official of the Eastern Jin (317-420) and Liu Song (420-479) dynasties, the collection of seven stories was based on an earlier compilation of ten stories collected by a Buddhist recluse named Xie Fu 謝敷, but lost in 399. While this collection was written over one hundred years after Dharmaraksa's translation of the *Lotus,* Chün-Fang Yü notes that the first story in this collection about a Buddhist named Zhu Changshu 竺長舒 takes place during the Yuankang era (291-299), about five years after the *Lotus Sutra* was translated into Chinese in Chang'an, demonstrating how quickly the *Lotus Sutra* and specifically its content about the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara or Guanyin "found willing ears and believing hearts in China."[16] The following is Zhu Changshu's tale:

> Zhu Changshu's ancestors were from the western regions. Over generations they had accumulated property and become wealthy. During the Yuankang era (291-299) of the Jin dynasty Changshu moved to Loyang. He was a devout believer in the Buddha and especially loved to recite the *Avalokiteśvara Sutra*. One day the neighbor's house directly behind caught fire. Changshu's house was made of thatch and it was directly downwind. He thought to himself that with the fire already so near, there was no time to get all of his things out. The *Avalokiteśvara Sutra* states that if one encounters fire, one should invoke [the bodhisattva] single-mindedly. He told his family to stop moving things and not to try to help put out the fire, but just to recite the sutra whole-heartedly. The fire soon consumed the neighbor's house and was right at the fence outside Changshu's house when suddenly the wind turned back. The fire burned itself out beside his house. Everyone considered this to be an efficacious response. However, there were four or five juvenile delinquents in the neighborhood who scoffed at it, saying, "The wind turned by chance on its own. What's miraculous about that? Wait for a dry evening and we'll burn the house. If it still doesn't burn, then we'll believe." Two days later the weather was very dry and a strong wind came. The youths got torches and threw three of them onto Changshu's house. Three times

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[16] Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2001), 161.

> they threw and three times the torches died out. They became very frightened and ran home. The next morning, they went to Changshu's house confessing about what happened the night before. They bowed to the ground and apologized. In reply, Changshu said, "I myself have no divine powers. I recited [the sutra] and invoked Avalokiteśvara. It should be considered [his] miraculous efficacy that aided me. You should repent and believe in him." Everyone in the neighborhood marveled with amazement at the strange incident.[17]

While the existence of the tale of Zhu Changshu is evidence that there were early Chinese Buddhists who believed in and followed the prescription within the Avalokiteśvara chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* by invoking the bodhisattva's name to save them from disasters, the format of the story itself and its resemblance to previous non-Buddhist tales suggests that the creators of these stories adapted established story formats and genres for Buddhist purposes. Keith Knapp posits that the tale of Zhu Changshu was modeled on tales from accounts of filial sons in official historical chronicles such as the *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書.[18] Knapp points to two biographies of filial sons in which avoiding fire is also a component. In the first half of the biography of a second century C.E. filial son named Cai Shun, fire is avoided because of filial piety towards his mother:

> His style-name was Junzhong. His father died when he was young. He lived alone with his mother and supported her. Once when he went out to get wood a guest suddenly came. Seeing that Shun would not return, his mother bit her finger. Shun's

[17] I referred to three previous English translations. For Chün-Fang Yü's translation, see Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2001), 163-164. For Donald Gjertson's version, see Donald Gjertson, "A Study and Translation of the *Ming-pao chi*: a T'ang Dynasty Collection of Buddhist Tales," (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1975), 21-22. Robert Ford Campany's version is a part of his translation of the *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記, which is a later collection in which the story reappears. See Robert Ford Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012, 98-99.

[18] Chün-Fang Yü was first to point to Knapp's work after her translation of Zhu Changshu's tale. Yü, 164. See Keith Knapp, "Accounts of Filial Sons: *Ru* Ideology in Early Medieval China," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley 1996), 179.

> heart suddenly moved. He threw down the wood and quickly returned home. He kneeled and asked how his mother hurt herself. His mother told him that a guest suddenly arrived and that she bit her finger merely to summon him. His mother died when she was 90. Before she was buried a fire started to burn in the village. The fire was soon pressing down on their home. Shun embraced the coffin and wailed and cried to Heaven. The fire thereupon leapt over his house and burned another. Shun's home was the only one to escape the fire...[19]

Both stories above share the element of fire endangering and then avoiding the house of the protagonist of the story. A similar occurrence of avoiding fire takes place in the biography of Gu Chu 古初 because of his filial piety towards his father. Knapp dates this biography from the *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記 to a time shortly after 120 CE and translates it as follows:

> Changsha had a righteous gentleman named Gu Chu. When his father died, but was not yet buried, a fire started in his neighbor's home and reached [Gu] Chu's home. However, his father's coffin could not be moved [away in time]. Chu braved the flames and prostrated himself on top of the coffin. Right at that moment the fire was extinguished. [People] took it to be a response brought on by his filiality.[20]

For Knapp, the tale of Zhu Changshu in comparison with the two biographies above demonstrates a clear case of Buddhists borrowing the filial miracle story format. For the filial biographies, it is fire stopping by supernatural means in response to a man's filial piety. For the Buddhist tale, it is fire stopping in response to a man's invoking a bodhisattva. Knapp also notes another element shared by the biography of Gu Chu and the Buddhist miracle tale. Both contain a line that shows the people believing the incident to be a supernatural response to the abilities of the protagonist. For the story of Gu Chu, it is the people believing the incident to be "a response brought on by his filiality." In the Buddhist

[19] Knapp, 91. The motif of the mother biting her finger, moving the son's heart and making him return home is also found in strange tales related to filial children in the *Sou shen ji*. See Kenneth DeWoskin, trans. *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 129, 130.

[20] Ibid., 147.

tale, halfway through the story and after the fire first dies down, the author states, "Everyone considered this to be an efficacious response." However, at the end of the story, in response to the belief that he had powers, Zhu Changshu emphasizes that he himself has no powers and did not create the miracle, but that it was because he invoked the bodhisattva as he had learned to do so from the *Avalokiteśvara Sutra.* Chün-Fang Yü notes that in these cases, they all share the belief in sympathetic resonance or *ganying* 感應, in which the sincere and single-minded thought or action of a man could move Heaven, causing miraculous effects.[21]

What is important to note concerning this early medium of storytelling is that while the response, a house saved from fire, was similar, the stimulus was different. In the case of the accounts of filial sons, it was sincere filial piety on the part of Cai Shun and Gu Chu that moved Heaven to react and stop the fire. However, in the case of Zhu Changshu, his sincere and single-minded recitation of the *Avalokiteśvara Sutra* and invocation of the bodhisattva initiated the miraculous response from the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara or Guanyin. The stimulus of filial piety in the narrative was replaced with the stimulus of Buddhist piety.

Another component that the filial sons accounts and the Buddhist account do share is their didactic nature. Knapp writes that Accounts of Filial Sons were written with the purpose of serving as models of behavior for their readers.[22] Similarly, the devote protagonists of the Buddhist miracle tales could be seen as modeling devotion and action for their readers as well. Because the formats and contents of the above stories are similar, both Knapp and Yü see this as a case of Buddhist adaptation of an established story format. Readers who were already familiar with accounts of filial sons would be more responsive to

[21] Yü, 153.

[22] Knapp, 107.

miracle stories about Guanyin because of their familiarity with the shared story components. The adoption of story elements found within the Accounts of Filial Sons genre by Buddhists who composed miracle tales serves as one of the earliest examples of media adaptation by Buddhists for purposes of Dharma propagation.

Buddhist miracle tales and Chinese strange tales

While the above examples show a similarity between Buddhist miracle tales and account of filial sons, Donald Gjertson makes a clear case of Buddhist miracle tales sharing similarities to the Chinese strange tales or *zhiguai* genre. Gjertson states, "In terms of language and narrative structure the miracle tales are indistinguishable from the strange tales, and have in fact often been considered part of that genre."[23] He goes on to assert that in similarities both have the following qualities:

1. Straightforward narration of a single incident handled in normal time sequences (except for netherworld journeys which may have a flashback)

2. Absence of classical and literary allusions found in most Chinese prose written during the Six Dynasties period

3. Similar motifs such as visits to the netherworld

One example Gjertson gives of a Buddhist miracle tale with the above listed qualities is the tale of Cheng Daohui 程道惠 who lived during the Jin dynasty (265-420 CE).[24] The story from the late fifth century *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記 can be summarized as follows: Daohui

[23] Donald Gjertson, "The Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tale: A Preliminary Survey," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (Jul. – Sep., 1981), 299.

[24] Donald Gjertson, "A Study and Translation of the *Ming-pao chi*: a T'ang Dynasty Collection of Buddhist Tales," (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1975), 30-34. This same tale is translated by Campany as well. See Campany, 145-147.

was a Daoist who did not believe in the Buddha. In the fifteenth year of Taiyuan 太元 (390), he died of sickness, but the area around his heart was still warm and his family did not prepare him for burial. He came back to life several days later. He said that when he died, a group of men tied him up and prepared to take him away when a monk intervened, saying he should not be tied up because he had fortune from former lives. The men untied him, but still pressed him to go with them. While they walked on a level road, he saw sinners being forced to run through thick brambles of thorns off the road. They envied Daohui, saying how disciples of the Buddha had cultivated such fortune. When Daohui replied that he did not practice the Dharma, they said that he had simply forgotten. It was then that Daohui remembered he had honored the Buddha in the past. However, in his present rebirth, he met with evil people in his youth and became deluded into following a deviant path. Daohui was taken to see a man seated in an audience chamber and facing south who told him that he was not supposed to come. Another man held up a document, saying Daohui had destroyed altars to the earth god and killed people. Based on his crimes, he had to come. The monk from before defended him by saying it was not a sin to destroy an altar to the earth god and that in his past lives he had done many deeds of good fortune. Also, although killing was a serious offense, the time for retribution had not arrived. The seated man decided that those who wrote down his name should be punished and told Daohui that the demons had made a mistake, wrongly arresting him and bringing him there. However, forgetting his previous lives and not upholding the Dharma also played a factor. The story next describes different hells Daohui saw on a tour on his way back to the living. After the tour, the monk gave him a bell-shaped object, telling him that he would need it in the future, predicting he would live to ninety if he survived an upcoming peril on a certain date. On his way home, he passed by relatives and a maidservant grieving over his death. When he reached his home where guests

and relatives were going through the mourning rites, he re-entered his corpse, came back to life, and spoke of seeing his relatives and the maidservant on his way, who confirmed his account. At the end of the story, the reader learns that Daohui recovered from a mental illness ordeal being "struck dumb" on the exact date the monk had warned of previously and later became an official in Guangzhou, dying at the age of sixty-nine in the sixth year of Yuanjia (429 CE).

The above tale of Cheng Daohui has several elements that appear to be common motifs and elements found in strange tales. Gjertson notes that the tale was "written in the same straight-forward non-allusive narrative prose style as the then flourishing strange tales."[25] This meant they were written in a simple literary language that was not strictly set to symmetrical four and six character parallel phrases. And like strange tales, they lacked the classical and literary allusion that was a common feature of Chinese prose from the Six Dynasties period. Beyond the writing style, several story elements are also shared between *zhiguai* and Buddhist miracle tales. One tale from a popular early fourth century CE collection of strange tales, the *Sou shen ji* 搜神記, serves as an example of shared story elements with Daohui's tale. The tale is about a sixty-year-old woman named Li Ngo, recorded to have died in the fourth year of Jian An 建安 during the Han dynasty (199 CE). After her return to life, she tells her story, here translated by Kenneth DeWoskin:

> It was discovered that I had been sent to the underworld in response to a false summons by the Arbiter of Fate, so when the proper time came, I was released to return home. Just outside the west gate of the shadowy capital I ran into my first cousin, Liu Po-wen. He was surprised, stopped me to inquire what had happened and then burst into tears and mourning.
>
> I said to him, 'Po-wen, I was summoned down here by error and am being sent back. However, I don't know my way and can scarce travel it by myself; could you secure me a guide? Further, because I was summoned here some ten days ago,

[25] Gjertson, 34.

> my family has already buried my body. Now even though I make it back, how will I get my body out of the tomb?" Po-wen forthwith sent the gate-guard to make inquiry at the Population Bureau, telling him: 'The Arbiter of Fate one day in error summoned the female Li Ngo, of Wu-ling Commandery, and she has recently been released for return. Ngo, however, has been here for a number of days, so her body has been buried in a sealed casket, and she wishes to know how she will get her corpse out of the coffin. Additionally, she is frail and certainly should have an escort for this journey, should she not? She is, after all, my cousin, and I should be delighted if I could ease things for her.'
>
> "And then the answer came back: 'There is a certain male, Li Hei by name, who comes from the western part of Wu-ling, who is also being returned to the upper world. It would be convenient for him to accompany her. Further, it is ordered that this Li Hei should go to Ngo's neighbor Ts'ai Chung and cause him to excavate Li Ngo's tomb.'[26]

In the second half of the tale, Li Ngo comes back to life and testifies in the trial of her neighbor to help get him pardoned from committing tomb desecration for digging her up. She also delivers a letter from her deceased cousin, Po-wen, to Po-wen's son. At the end of the tale, the family of the son of Po-wen avoids a plague because of Po-wen's forewarning and help.

In terms of the motif of visiting the netherworld, the tale of Cheng Daohui and that of Li Ngo share similar components. This includes a clerical error in documents for the dead, which causes a judge to send the story's protagonist back to the living realm, a guide to help the protagonist return to the realm of the living, and an otherworld warning that helps characters in the living realm avoid a possible future calamity at the end of the story. Another element often seen in both forms of afterlife tales is the protagonist having a warm spot beneath or around the heart at death.[27] With the tale of Li Ngo being a part of the earlier

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[26] Gan Ban comp., Kenneth DeWoskin and J. I. Crump, Jr. trans., *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 173-174.

[27] Campany refers to Zhou Junxun in noting that this element of warmth beneath the heart was a somatic explanation for why the protagonist is able to return to life after dying. See Campany, 145. For Campany's reference, see Zhou Junxun 周俊勛, *Wei Jin nanbeichao*

fourth century *Sou shen ji* along with other tales of people returning from the dead, it is likely that such netherworld story components had become established and anticipated, so that by the time Daohui's tale was being told, recorded and included into the fifth century *Mingxiang ji* collection, the originator and recorder of the tale consciously or unconsciously simply followed an established story format, but with additional Buddhist elements.

The Buddhist elements in Cheng Daohui's tale at times are subtle substitutions for non-Buddhist equivalents in the strange tales and at times are new additions absent from the earlier strange tales. For Cheng Daohui, it is a monk who serves as his guide and helper in the afterlife while Li Ngo gets help from a deceased cousin. And in the case of Cheng Daohui's story, there is a didactic slant with the element of karmic retribution that is absent from Li Ngo's tale. For while the protagonist in each story initially dies from having his or her name mistakenly written down, the judge in the Buddhist story mentions that one factor that likely influenced Cheng Daohui's appearance before the judge was his forgetting of his past lives and his not upholding the Dharma in his present life. In other words, not upholding the Dharma brought about a negative consequence. At the same time, having carried out many meritorious deeds and honoring the Buddha in his past life helped get him untied and gave him access to the level road on the journey to the spirit official's office as well as helping him postpone the retribution for his past sins. This element of karmic reward and retribution is absent from Li Ngo's story in which she simply dies, is told an error was made, and is sent back to the living. The entertaining tale has no lesson on karmic retribution for the reader.

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zhiguai xiaoshuo cihui 魏晉南北朝志怪小說詞彙研究 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 2006), 215-216.

Another component that is lacking in the strange tale version of the netherworld in connection to karmic reward and retribution is a description of hells or heavens. From Li Ngo's tale, the reader senses that the afterlife contains a bureaucracy with officials, a city, and people who exist similar to the way they exist in the living realm since Li Ngo bumped into her deceased cousin outside the west gate of the shadowy capital and he helped her by writing a letter to a Population Bureau to ask for a guide back to the living realm. Other strange tales that deal with journeys to the netherworld in the *Sou shen ji* also contain meetings with afterlife officials and with deceased family members, but no descriptions of heavens or hells. The Buddhist tale of Cheng Daohui, on the other hand, starts his journey with a description of a hell realm where sinners are forced to run through brambles of thorns. Other hell realms are also vividly depicted on his way back to the world of the living. The following excerpt from Campany's translation illustrates:

> He was led along, passing many walled cities, each of which was an earth prison where many millions of people were receiving retribution for their sins. He saw one [earth prison] where dogs ripped people into pieces, so that their flesh fell off and their blood covered the ground. In another, flocks of birds with beaks like spears flew in with great speed and fell on sinners suddenly, entering their mouths and piercing holes through them from within, the victims writhing, screaming as their sinews were broken and their bones scattered.[28]

Such vivid depictions of hells added an element of Buddhist cosmology that was absent from the non-Buddhist strange tale literature and implied a warning to readers on the workings of karmic retribution. The Buddhist tale also has a hint of attacking Daoist belief and practice with the monk defending Daohui's actions in destroying an altar to the earth god, saying such an action is not a real crime, implying such Daoist altars have no real value.

[28] Campany, 146-147.

However, there is at least one other characteristic the Buddhist miracle tales had that was shared with *zhiguai*. The authors or compilers of the tales spoke and wrote these tales as what they believed to be true and what was heard from stories passed on. This component of truth in writing for strange tales was even noticed by Chinese writers of later dynasties. In Lu Xun's (1881-1936) collection of strange tales from Chinese history, he quotes a Ming dynasty author on the topic of comparing Six Dynasties miracle tales with Tang dynasty literature: "Thus Hu Ying-lin of the Ming dynasty said: "Tales of miracles and the other world were popular during the Six Dynasties, but these were not entirely imaginary: most of them were based on hearsay and false reports. The Tang dynasty scholars, on the other hand, deliberately invented strange adventures and wrote them as fiction."[29] In other words, miracle tales from the Six Dynasties period may have told incredible stories, but many of these stories were based on the experiences of what actual people claimed to have encountered. Robert Ford Campany writes a more recent and detailed clarification of the purpose of miracle tales in the introduction to his translation of the *Mingxiang ji*:

> One particular feature of the miracle-tale genre must be made clear at the outset to avoid misunderstanding: the stories are not parables or fables; like fables, they are marshaled to make doctrinal or moral points, but unlike fables they are not presented as having been *made up* for this purpose. Rather, each story claims to represent someone's personal experience as relayed via a relatively short chain of transmission. Each, that is, to use (somewhat loosely) the terminology of folklore studies, is a memorate: a second-, third-, or fourth-hand narrative of events portrayed as having happened to someone in particular, and (I would add) a narrative that engages issues of sufficient importance to sustain the interest of narrative communities across multiple links in the chain of transmission.[30]

[29] Lu Hsun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Westport: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1973), 85.

[30] Robert Ford Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 17.

The compilers of strange tale collections made it a point to specify that they were collecting these tales to pass on what they believed to be true occurrences and to prove to a reading audience of the existence of strange anomalies in everyday life. Looking at the preface to the *Sou shen ji* attributed to Gan Bao 干寶, a government official and historian under Emperor Yuan of the Jin dynasty in the early fourth century, shows that scholars and historians were compiling these tales not as a means of creating fantastic works of fiction, but that they were trying to preserve and prove the existence of a spirit world and of extraordinary happenings beyond the known world of the commonplace for their reading audience. In part of Gan Bao's preface, translated by Campany, Gan Bao writes:

> "As for what I have herewith collected, when it sets forth what has been received from earlier accounts, any fault that might be found is not my own; if there are vacuous or erroneous places in what has been garnered from inquiries into more recent events, then I would wish to share the ridicule and criticism with former worthies and scholars. Even so, when it comes to what is set down here, it suffices to make clear that the way of spirits is not a fabrication (足以明神道之不誣也).
>
> The mass of words of the hundred schools are too many to be read in their entirety; what one receives through one's own ears and eyes is too much to be set down completely. What I have roughly chosen herewith will at least satisfy my aim of developing an 'eighth category' even if making only a poor explanation of it (今粗取足以演八略之旨, 成其微說而已). I will be fortunate if future curious gentlemen take not of its basic substance and if there is that in it which sets their minds wandering and captures their attention—and if I am not reproached for this."[31]

At the beginning of the excerpt, Gan Bao makes it a point to state that he is not the author to the tales, but merely a collector and transmitter of other people's accounts and experiences. Therefore, he should not be blamed for anything erroneous found in older tales before his time, but he was willing to share the blame for anything he heard from his own first-hand account and wrote down. His preface shows that by collecting and compiling tales of the

[31] Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 148-149.

strange that deal with spiritual encounters, fantastic creatures and the like, he is trying to prove to a reading audience that a spiritual world beyond the normal known world does exist and that such tales as he has collected them are true encounters and not fictional creations. However, knowing that his collection does contain incredible and unbelievable stories and being a government official and historian who is supposed to record truthful events, Gan Bao ends on a note of hoping he would not be looked down upon and discredited for writing such a work.

This notion of being a true story was important for Buddhist miracle tales as well, which tried to prove the notion of karma or cause and effect and that Buddhist teachings and practices were indeed effective. In a Buddhist miracle tale collection from the mid seventh century, the *Ming bao ji* 冥報記, or "Records of Supernatural Retribution", the compiler, Tang Lin 唐臨, who was also a government official and lay Buddhist, makes it a point to write down from who and where he heard each of the miracle tales that he collected. Below is one example translated by Gjertson:

> During the Wu-te period (618-626) a commissioner of the Board of Water Control (*tu-shui shih-che* 都水使者), Su Ch'ang, was made prefect (*tz'u-shih* 刺史) of Pa-chou 巴州. Ch'ang took his family with him to go take up his position, and when they were crossing the Chia-ling River 嘉陵江, a wind came up in mid-stream and the boat sank. More than sixty men and women sank at once into the river and drowned. But there was one concubine who often read the *Lotus Sutra*, and as the boat was sinking into the water, she clasped the sutra case to her head and swore they would sink together. The concubine was the only one who did not drown; she went along with the waves and after some time reached the bank, still carrying the sutra case when she emerged. When she opened [the case] and looked at the sutra, it was not the slightest bit damp. The woman is still alive in Yang-chou 楊州; she has married and is even more devout [than before].
>
> ((Ts'en 岑 told me the story, saying that he had heard it from the woman personally. When I traveled the river on official business, the boatmen also told the same story.))[32]

[32] Gjertson, 330.

The above tale, which is meant to demonstrate and prove the powers of salvation of the *Lotus Sutra*, ends with Tang Lin writing from who and where he heard the story. In this case, he emphasizes two sources – a man named Ts'en, who heard the story from the actual woman, and the boatmen of the river. By doing so he offers proof that these were real people telling of actual accounts and real people receiving some benefit by believing in the powers of protection described in the Buddhist sutras. Buddhist miracle tales and many strange tales were based on the hearsay that circulated in oral stories from people claiming to have undergone extraordinary experiences.

While Gjertson has written of the similarities between tales of the *zhiguai* genre and Buddhist miracle tales, he also claims two differences. One difference he writes of is that the compilers of the Buddhist miracle tales saw themselves as continuers of a tradition that had started before. Fu Liang, the compiler of the earliest extant collection of miracle tales of Guanyin, wrote to preserve what he could of the lost collection his father had given him, written by Xie Fu. The compiler of a succeeding collection on Guanyin and lay Buddhist government official, Zhang Yan 張演, was moved by Fu Liang's collection and compiled his own set of Guanyin miracle tales to pass on as well. This inspiration and continuation of tradition continued with succeeding Buddhist miracle tale collections including that of Tang Lin's. Concerning this lineage of miracle tale collections, Tang Lin writes the following in his preface translated by Gjertson:

> Many study the cause but forget the effect; doubt their ears but believe their eyes. Thus, if they hear someone say that there is a future retribution, then [they think] perhaps it exists, perhaps it does not. But if they see verifications of its efficacy, then they sigh in astonishment and profess belief. In the past there were Hsieh Fu 謝敷, a reclusive scholar of the Chin 晉 dynasty; Fu Liang 傅亮, president of the Department of the Affairs of State (*shang-shu ling* 尚書令) under the Sung 宋 dynasty; Chang Yen 張演, grand secretary in the Secretariat of the Heir Apparent (*t'ai-tzu chung-shu she-jen* 太子中書舍人); and Lu Kao 陸杲, an adjutant in the

> service of the director of instruction (*ssu-t'u ts'ung-shih chung-lang*) under the Ch'i 齊 dynasty; all of whom were famous or well respected men of their times, and all of whom wrote *Records of Miracles Concerning Avalokiteśvara* (*kuan-shih-yin ying-yen chi* 觀世音應驗記). And there was Hsiao Tzu-liang, Prince of Ching-ling 竟陵王 under the Ch'i dynasty, who wrote the *Hsüan-yen chi* 宣驗記, and Wang Yen 王琰 who wrote the *Ming-hsiang chi* 冥祥記. All of these works verified and made clear [the recompense] of good and evil and exhorted and admonished [people] of the future. They truly cause those who hear them to be deeply moved to understanding.
>
> Since I have admired the manner and message of these works, and also thinking to exhort people, I have ventured to write down things that I have heard, and collect them together to form this record. I have related fully [the stories] that I have received and how they came to be seen or heard. I have not embellished the language, and have always presented the true facts. All later readers please consider them carefully.[33]

Here Tang Lin gives the lineage of Buddhist miracle tales collected and written before his own collection. He writes his own collection as a way of continuing the tradition, using accounts gathered from his own time period. This implies he is not starting something radically new that could be rejected, but is instead simply following precedents already established. The last section of the preface also emphasizes that what he has collected is based on the actual accounts of real people.

Research by Robert Ford Campany, however, has shown that writers of the *zhiguai* genre of the late Han and Six Dynasties were not necessarily creating something new, but may have been following their own precedent set by a tradition of cosmographic collecting from before the Han dynasty, when writing about strange anomalies, events, and customs on the territorial frontiers was a way for the government to maintain order and control. "Governance entailed a cosmographic enterprise, a placing of the periphery, especially that which was anomalous in the periphery, into some systematic relationship with the center."[34]

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[33] Gjertson, 204-205.

[34] Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 125.

By the Han period, this tradition of writing about cosmographic collecting fell out of favor. Campany argues that some writers of the *zhiguai* genre during the Han and Six Dynasties used the previous cosmographic tradition from before the Han period as a justifying precedent.[35] If this is the case, then the compilers of the Buddhist miracle tales were not acting differently by seeing themselves as continuing a tradition as Gjertson has suggested, but were instead following a parallel course of action with compilers of the strange tale collections.

The second difference Gjertson notes between Buddhist tales and strange tales is that the Buddhist tales are didactic in nature while *zhiguai* are not. This didactic nature is instead something shared with the accounts of filial sons as mentioned above. Buddhist miracle tales attempted to influence the reader or listener by giving a lesson on karmic retribution or the merits of praying and making offerings to bodhisattvas and having faith in the Buddhist teachings. In Tang Lin's preface above, he directly states that he wrote with the thought to exhort people. And the example of the woman with the *Lotus Sutra* on the sinking boat above highlights this didacticism, as the lesson in the tale that readers are meant to take away with them is that the *Lotus Sutra* has powers of protection and can save believers from disaster. These powers are based on a Buddhist version of *ganying*, or stimulus and response, suggesting that if someone is truly sincere in their devotional actions, they will receive rewards for such sincerity and devotion based on the Buddhist laws of karma and gaining merit.

An examination of individual tales within different strange tale compilations, however, shows that while non-Buddhist strange tales did not have the express purpose of

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[35] Ibid., 126.

influencing readers to follow a particular model of behavior, they were not completely devoid of stories regarding rewards and retribution. The following is an example from the *Sou shen ji*:

> Kuai Shen took care of his mother with the utmost filial piety. Once there was a black crane that was shot by a hunter and it went to Shen in exhaustion. Shen took care of it and treated its injury. After it recovered, he released it. Later the crane came at night to the outside of the door. Shen grabbed a candle to have a look. He saw that a pair of cranes, male and female, had arrived. Each held pearls in their beaks as a reward for Shen.[36]

The above tale is one of sixteen stories describing rewards and retributions in relation to animals in the twentieth fascicle of the *Sou shen ji.* While there is a cause and effect portion to the story of Kuai Shen gaining a reward for caring for an injured bird, there is the added description of Kuai Shen in the very first line describing him as a filial son who cared for his mother. Like the biographies in the accounts of filial sons, the reader can potentially see Kuai Shen as a role model in his filial piety and compassion. While there is no religious element in this tale influencing the reader to follow a certain practice, the simple message of 'doing good brings rewards while doing evil brings retribution' in the process of resonance or *ganying* is one that exists in several strange tales like that of the filial miracle tales and Buddhist miracle tales. This suggests that while strange tales were not written with a didactic purpose in mind, some tales that shared the element of resonance or rewards and retributions with Buddhist miracle tales and accounts of filial sons had the potential to influence readers towards doing good rather than evil. Resonance as a motif among these genres of literature

[36] Gan Bao 干寶, comp., Ma Yin Qin 馬銀琴, trans. Ch., *Sou shen ji* 搜神記 (Beijing: *Zhonghua shuju* 中華書局, 2012), 437. I also referred to Gan Bao, comp., Kenneth DeWoskin and J. I. Crump, Jr., trans., *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 238.

may have been a common and expected story element, making Buddhist use of resonance within Buddhist miracle tales even more strategically necessary to attract readers.

Adapting popular media and keeping it simple

Two other scholars who have pointed to the Buddhist borrowing of established pre-modern media forms for propagation include Guo Zhenyi and Kenneth Dewoskin. In his *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi* 中國小說史, Guo writes that Buddhists understood the power that strange tale collections had among the people of society and how to adapt such story structures to their usage by inserting the most superficial elements concerning cause and effect and efficacious elements into their own collections during the Six Dynasties which included works such as the *Xuanyan ji* 宣驗記, *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記, *Yuanhun zhi* 冤魂志, and the *Jingyi ji* 旌異記.[37] And in his study of the *Sou shen ji* Dewoskin writes:

> Buddhists depended heavily on tales of magic and marvels in their missionary work. The interest in indigenous materials is not surprising since it would enhance the appeal of their doctrine to the Chinese. This is the context in which the *Sou-shen-lu* and *Sou-shen-lun* appeared before the T'ang Dynasty. In their utilization of these materials they would have exercised complete abandon in altering them to meet the particular doctrinal or entertainment needs of the moment, interested as they were in borrowing the prestige of the name and conveying the meaning of the texts as they understood them. As the small change in the names would imply, the books were probably selections from the *Sou-shen-chi*, possibly rewritten to emphasize certain points, and are among the first examples of a tradition culminated in the [Dunhuang *Sou-shen-chi* and the 8 chuan *Sou-shen-chi*].[38]

The works mentioned above by both Guo and Dewoskin are all examples of Buddhists taking the popular medium of the day, the strange tale collection, and adapting it to their own usage to propagate Buddhism. And in keeping with the style of strange tales, the

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[37] Guo Zhenyi 郭箴一, *Zhongguo Xiaoshuoshi* 中國小說史 (Beijing: *Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe* 中國社會科學出版社, 2010), 71-72.

[38] Kenneth J. DeWoskin, "The Sou-Shen-Chi and the Chih-Kuai tradition: a bibliographic and generic study" (Ph.D. diss, Columbia University, 1974), 161-162.

Buddhist miracles, as mentioned by Guo and as seen in the above example of the concubine and the *Lotus Sutra,* were not loaded with tenets of Buddhist doctrine, but were instead simple stories that told of miraculous events that were meant to show proof of karmic retribution or the efficaciousness of a Buddhist sutra or deity. These stories could be classified in the same genre as strange tales before them, but with the added Buddhist element, they could potentially get readers and listeners to reflect on Buddhist notions of karmic retribution and on the efficaciousness of Buddhism.

II. Adapting the Morality Book

Buddhist use of popular media continued through the succeeding dynastic eras, leading to the adoption of *shanshu* 善書, or the morality book format, during the Ming dynasty. Morality books were books that contained lists of both good deeds and bad. Readers were encouraged to carry out the good deeds and avoid doing evil. Following Daoist cosmology, the idea behind listing deeds as good or bad was that all actions of a person were recorded by various spiritual agents of Heaven and Earth, who would then report to Heaven on a person's misdeeds. Through *ganying* or resonance, Heaven would then reduce a person's lifespan or mete out punishment or misfortune for evil actions and grant fortunes and benefits for good actions. According to one morality book from the Southern Song period, the *Taishang ganying pian,* or *Treatise of the Most Exalted One on Moral Retribution*, agents that recorded a person's misdeeds include the Three Ministers of the Northern Constellation, the Three Worm-Spirits inside a person's body, and the Kitchen God. Since a bad report to heaven from these agents would result in a person's lifespan being reduced, the reader was encouraged to carry out good deeds and follow the Way (*dao*)

so as to gain respect, happiness, wealth, protection from spiritual beings, and long life.[39] Morality books first appeared during the Song dynasty, but increased in popularity during the Yuan and Ming dynasties. One category within morality books were known as Ledgers of Merit and Demerit (*Gongguoge*), in which actions in life were given a point value. Good actions were given values of merit points while bad actions were given points of demerit. Rather than waiting for Heaven to bestow an unknown amount of fortune or misfortune, a person could find out how many points different deeds were worth in these ledgers, record his own daily activities, and tally up for himself the points from his actions with the goal of building up merits rather than demerits to obtain good fortune. The earliest extant morality book is the *Ledger of Merit and Demerit of the Taiwei Immortal* 太微仙君功過格 from the Song dynasty. The *Ledger* is attributed to a Daoist, Youxuan Zi in 1171, who wrote that the Taiwei Immortal came to him in a dream to transmit the teachings to him, after which he woke up and wrote out the *Ledger* in less than an hour.

According to Cynthia Brokaw, while the influence of the *Ledger of Merit and Demerit* during the era of its production is unknown, the "morality book movement" became popular in the sixteenth century, gaining widespread notice among Chinese literati, partially as a result of the late Ming scholar-official Yuan Huang, who wrote an autobiographical essay, "Determining Your Own Fate" ("*Liming pian*"), in which he attributed his successes in life to practice of merit accumulation, resulting in ten new ledgers being produced within a century of the essay's publication.[40] Chün-Fang Yü writes that morality books as a genre

[39] William T. De Bary and Irene Bloom, comp., *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 900.

[40] Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 61.

were never looked upon as literary or philosophical works, but they were printed in huge quantities, distributed widely, and had commentaries and prefaces to them that were written by scholars.[41] Morality books were then one form of popular media during the Ming dynasty and one that the famous Buddhist monk, Zhuhong (1535-1615), adopted for Buddhist purposes.

The example of Zhuhong's use of the morality book format is a clear case of the Buddhist understanding of the power of popular media and adopting the media form after a conditioning process in which the content of the medium is changed to suit Buddhist purposes. In the preface to his own morality book, the *Record of Self-knowledge* (*Zizhi lu* 自知錄), Zhuhong wrote of his influence by the *Ledger of Merits and Demerits of the Taiwei Immortal* as well as the way in which he chose to later use the morality book form himself:

> When I was young, I read the *Ledger of Merits and Demerits of the Taiwei Immortal* and was very pleased. I immediately reprinted it to distribute to people free of charge. Afterwards I became a monk and traveled going so far as to return to my native home in seclusion in the deep valley. I followed the way of Chan meditation and finally I had no time for even this [printing of books]. Now I have grown old. And from among the scattered books of my collection I have again found this book and am as pleased as I was in the past. I thereupon made a few additions, subtractions and corrections, adding some content that was not there before and again printing it and distributing it to people.[42]

The above preface excerpt shows two phases of his life – his youth before becoming a Buddhist monk when he was influenced by the *Ledger* and copied it out as it was and his old age after having lived as a Buddhist monk and created his own morality book, modeled on

[41] Chün-Fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 103.

[42] Zhuhong 釋袾宏, *Zizhiluxu* 自知錄序 [Record of Self-knowledge Preface], Wanli 32 (1604), 1a.

the original framework of the *Ledger*, but quite different in terms of content based on his later Buddhist point of view.

His strategy in utilizing the morality book by making "a few additions, subtractions and corrections, adding some content that was not there before" is the same strategy that Buddhists during the Six Dynasties period used in adopting the use of the strange tale literature for Buddhist propagation. In terms of additions and subtractions, he subtracted Daoist elements while adding Buddhist ones. Chün-fang Yü notes that he removed two sections that were in the *Ledger* entitled "doctrinal texts" (教典門 *jiaodianmen*) and "worship and cultivation" (焚修門 *fenxiumen*), which included the transmission of Daoist charms, spells and registers (法籙 *falu*), and replaced them with sections concerning the Three Jewels.[43] However, the format of Zhuhong's *Record* follows the same format established by the *Ledger* and lists many of the same actions. In the *Ledger,* for example, the reader finds items meant to influence people with the power to judge and sentence others:

> Saving someone from the death penalty: for one person, one hundred points of merit
> Commuting someone's death sentence: for one person, fifty points of merit
> Exempting someone from imprisonment: one person, forty points of merit
> Reducing someone's term of imprisonment: one person, thirty points of merit[44]

Within the *Record of Self-knowledge* Zhuhong includes similar items:

> To save one person from the death penalty counts as one hundred merits.
> To pardon one person sentenced to the death penalty counts as eighty merits.
> To reduce one person's sentence from the death penalty counts as forty merits.[45]

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[43] Chün-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 135-136.

[44] Wm. Theodore de Bary, comp. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume One: From Earliest Times to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 905.

[45] Yü, 234.

Rather than create a new list of deeds that simply supplemented those of the *Ledger*, Zhuhong made a morality book for his era that could replace the use of the Song dynasty morality book by including the same deeds with new merit point values. As seen with the above example, the *Record* included the same items as the *Ledger* in terms of showing kindness and compassion in daily life. This allowed people to read and use Zhuhong's *Record* just as they would any other morality book. However, the *Record* had the added element of descriptions and merit points for Buddhist related actions as well, including forty-eight items of merit and fifty-three items of demerit concerning actions related to the Three Jewels. Deeds beneficial to the Three Jewels include the following examples:

> Paying obeisance to Mahāyāna scriptures fifty times counts as one merit.
> When lectures on the True Law are given, attend them with a sincere heart; each attendance counts one merit.
> To feed three monks who ask for food counts as one merit.
> To feed two monks after inviting them to one's home counts as one merit.[46]

Deeds harmful to the Three Jewels include the following:

> In chanting sutras, to misread one character counts one demerit, to omit one character counts one demerit.
> To think all kinds of irrelevant thoughts while chanting a sutra counts five demerits.
> To think evil thoughts while chanting a sutra counts ten demerits.
> To say things that have no relation to sutra chanting counts five demerits.[47]

The sections dealing with deeds related to the Three Jewels reflect Zhuhong's ideal that readers of his *Record* would be people who attended and supported Buddhist activities such as sutra chanting and donations to support Buddhist temples and the Sangha or at least, through reading the *Record*, would be influenced towards Buddhist activities to gain merit. Anyone who was already reading morality books and following their prescriptions to gain

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[46] Ibid., 240.

merit would then have a new version to influence them towards Buddhist-related deeds as well. This was the strategy behind Buddhist adoption of popular media – using an established format, but adding Buddhist elements for the medium to serve the purpose of propagating Buddhist teachings. This same strategy is applied to Buddhist usage of television starting in the twentieth century, which will be detailed in the second chapter.

III. Scriptural Foundations

While the above examples show how Buddhists in pre-modern China adapted popular media for Buddhist purposes, an examination of Buddhist doctrine that was important in China serves as the basis for the question of why Buddhists could easily adopt different media. As mentioned above, the *Lotus Sutra* was an early influence in Chinese Buddhism, first being translated into Chinese in 286 CE and being one of the early Mahayana sutras to introduce to China the powers of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara or Guanyin to protect people in times of distress and calamity. Beyond teaching about the Bodhisattva Guanyin, one of the major components of the *Lotus Sutra* is its doctrine of skillful means (Ch. *fangbian* 方便), which may have played a role in giving Buddhists a reason to use whatever means necessary to propagate Buddhism. This component of skillful means is first revealed in the second chapter of the *Lotus.* The Buddha explains that throughout his teaching career, he had been using expedient means to teach people of Buddhism by teaching people about the paths of a voice-hearer and of a bodhisattva to attain awakening. However, the Buddha now reveals in the *Lotus* that the teaching of those paths was simply an expedient means leading to the true revelation that everyone can become buddhas themselves. This strategy of expedient means that the Buddha has used to finally

[47] Ibid., 251.

teach about the actual goal of becoming a buddha and not simply an arhat is demonstrated in the sutra through parables in the third and fourth chapter.

In the parable of the burning house that the Buddha shares in the third chapter, a father tries to save his children by getting them to leave their house, which has caught fire and is burning down. The father manages to reach the outside of the house, but he notices that the children are still inside and too attached to their games to realize the danger of the house burning down around them. The father decides to tell the children that he has three varieties of carriages for them to play on if they come out of the house – goat-drawn carriages, deer-drawn carriages, and ox-drawn carriages. The children come out after hearing of the carriages. Once out of the house and safe, the father equally gives each of his sons a great white ox carriage, of greater value than the three different carriages he originally spoke of. After the Buddha tells this parable to his disciples, he explains that like the father in the parable, the Buddha also uses skillful means to preach the Dharma and expediently taught about three vehicles in Buddhism when there is really only the One Buddha Vehicle.[48] Near the end of the chapter, the Buddha re-iterates his teaching in verse form and describes how his disciples should only preach the *Lotus Sutra* to worthy men, who are honest, gentle and have no anger:

> For men like him,
> And only for them, may you preach.
> Again, there may be a son of the Buddha
> In the midst of the great multitude
> Who, with pure thought
> And by resort to various means,

[48] Leon Hurvitz trans., *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press), 55-60. The three carriages in the parable represent the three vehicles of the śrāvaka or voice hearer, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva. According to the *Lotus*, although the Buddha originally taught of these three paths in Buddhism, the actual path is the One Vehicle in which the goal is to become nothing less than a Buddha.

Parables, and phrases,
Preaches the dharma, unobstructed.
For men like him,
And only for them, may you preach.[49]

Here in the third chapter is a repeated revelation from the second chapter that the Buddha has used expedient means to teach about the ultimate goal of buddhahood. The parable of the burning house demonstrates that the father, who represents the Buddha, is justified in using any means necessary to save his children, who represent the sentient beings of the world. At the end of the chapter, the Buddha directs his disciples to preach the *Lotus* to men who use various means to preach the Dharma. In other words, not only does the Buddha use various means in teaching, but there are other preachers out there who use various means, and those preachers are worthy of hearing about the *Lotus* so that they too can preach its teachings to others. The above examples of Chinese lay Buddhist scholar-officials who compiled Buddhist miracle tale collections in which people are saved from disaster because of keeping the *Lotus Sutra* and following its prescriptions could easily fit into the category of such preachers since they were also using a different means to preach. And the Buddha's use of parables in the *Lotus* to get his point across is something that potentially served as a model or a precedent for Buddhists in early China to follow with their use of Buddhist miracle tales. Parables as told in the Buddhist sutras and Chinese Buddhist miracle tales both served the purpose of conveying the teachings of Buddhism by skillful means.

Another passage praising the Buddha for his use of expedient means comes at the end of the fourth chapter after another parable is presented on skillful means. One of the Buddha's disciples, Mahākāśyapa, praises the Buddha in verse form saying:

[49] Ibid., 76.

> For ordinary fellows, taken with signs,
> He preaches in accord with what is peculiarly appropriate,
> The buddhas, with respect to the dharmas,
> Have achieved the utmost in self-mastery.
> Knowing the beings'
> Varied desires and predilections,
> As well as their strength of will,
> And in accord with what they can bear,
> By resort to incalculable parables
> He preaches the dharma to them.[50]

Appearing again in the above excerpt is the Buddha resorting to preaching innumerable parables, but this time, is the added notion that different means and different parables need to be used based on the appropriate situation since people have "varied desires and predilections". This description of people having different predilections fits well with the two different forms of popular media that were prevalent during the Six Dynasties and the Ming dynasty with the strange tale literature and the morality book movement. Buddhists adopting each medium for its own usage can be seen as an expedient means. The notion of using expedient means is repeated in different sections of the *Lotus* and came to be understood as one of the sutra's central teachings, likely influencing Chinese Buddhist methods of teaching and propagation and serving as a doctrinal foundation upon which Buddhists during the Six Dynasties and Zhuhong during the Ming dynasty could adopt popular media for Buddhist usage. Skillful means is also the reason Buddhists in the twentieth century could adopt the usage of television and other modern forms of mass media as well as will be shown in the following chapters.

[50] Hurvitz, 92.

IV. Conclusion

Through examining different segments in the history of Buddhist media strategies and the adoption of popular pre-modern media in China, namely strange tales and accounts of filial sons during the Six Dynasties period and morality books during the Ming dynasty, a foundation and precedent for the Buddhist adoption of popular media in the modern era has been established. And by examining a core belief in the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist tradition based on the doctrinal concept of skillful means or expedient means found in the *Lotus Sutra,* a reason for the ease in Buddhist adaptation of new media is also established. The phenomenon of Buddhist laity and monastics adopting and adapting new media for Buddhist purposes during the Six Dynasties and the Ming dynasty set up a precedent for modern and future Buddhist communities to follow in adopting the use of modern media technologies. Based on these precedents, several characteristics that were a part of how Buddhists used pre-modern literary genres will resurface in the examination of how Taiwanese Buddhists have adopted the use of television in Chapter Two.

After the first two steps of looking at a tradition's history and its core beliefs, the third step in Heidi Campbell's framework of religious adaptation of new media involves examining the negotiation and conditioning process to make a medium acceptable based on the religious community's values and beliefs. This conditioning process was seen in the case of Buddhist adaptation of the pre-modern strange tale story genres by adding Buddhist story elements such as a monk, notions of karma, and Buddhist hells, that were absent in the original mainstream tales. This process was seen again in Zhuhong's adoption of the morality book format with the removal of Daoist elements and the inclusion of Buddhist ones, all while keeping the same written framework of the morality book. This same conditioning process will be seen again in Chapter Two with the Buddhist adoption of the

drama and news formats for television, removing characteristics of drama and news that do not conform with Buddhist values and adding in segments or components that do conform. Another characteristic that was important to the strange tale genre and Buddhist miracle tale genre that will present itself again in Buddhist television drama is the notion of the tales all being true stories that are simple and straight-forward. Traits that were present in early Buddhist media strategies appearing through time from the Six Dynasties to the Ming dynasty show that Chinese Buddhists were willing to use whatever means available to spread the Dharma and this continues into the present.

Chapter Two

Taiwanese Buddhist Television

I. Modern Buddhist Mass Media Starting Points

While Buddhist use of the television medium in Taiwan may be considered a continuing pattern of media usage that followed the precedent of Buddhist adoption of pre-modern print forms of media, the adoption of television has brought with it questions regarding ownership, advertising, and governmental and corporate influence that were not present in the pre-modern usage of strange tales and morality books discussed in the previous chapter. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have written of the modern mass media in terms of its integral relation to advertising and consumerism. For Horkheimer and Adorno, television would fall into their category of a culture industry, which views people as consumers to be controlled and influenced into buying products that are advertised directly and indirectly on mass media. According to Horkheimer and Adorno:

> What is decisive today is no longer Puritanism…but the necessity, inherent in the system, of never releasing its grip on the consumer, of not for a moment allowing him or her to suspect that resistance is possible. This principle requires that while all needs should be presented to individuals as capable of fulfillment by the culture industry, they should be so set up in advance that individuals experience themselves through their needs only as eternal consumers, as the culture industry's object.[51]

Along this line of thinking, the producers of mass media such as television, film, and radio see audiences only as a means of profiting through audience consumption of the entertainment itself as well as through audience consumption of the manufactured products that are advertised through the entertainment. A corroborating view of how mass media operates is found in the work of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, in which they state

[51] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments,* (New York: Continuing Pub. Co., 1972), 113.

that the first three filters for controlling television stations are based on: (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; and (3) the reliance of the mass media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power."[52] In both cases the mass media form of television is a commercial medium with profit as its goal.

One question that arises with such views related to television concerns how Buddhist institutions have confronted these matters of advertising, profit seeking, and consumerism in relation to television usage when one of the core teachings in Buddhism is that suffering is caused by desire. Do these established methods of television usage mean that Buddhist organizations need to compromise their values and advertise products as a way to generate income? This chapter addresses the above question along with questions concerning when Buddhist organizations first started to use television in Taiwan, what the goals are for Buddhist institutions that use television as a means of propagation, and what methods of Buddhist television broadcasting are being used to meet those goals. An examination of the goals for Taiwanese Buddhist television operation will be contrasted with Herman and Chomsky's findings on how mainstream television operates.

While the previous chapter examined the history of Chinese Buddhist adoption of pre-modern media forms and the core beliefs that allow for such adoption as the first and second steps in Heidi Campbell's framework for the religious-social shaping of technology, this chapter will examine the Buddhist use of television through the third step of the Campbell's framework – the negotiation process in which religious communities decide on

the usage of a new technology and condition that usage to make the technology acceptable to the community's values and traditional patterns of technology usage. This chapter will show that while the Buddhist groups in Taiwan that adopt television for Buddhist purposes use two different program strategies for their broadcasts, either (1) predominantly broadcasting religious lectures or (2) adapting established mainstream television formats for Buddhist purposes, all of the Buddhist groups adopt television on their own terms based on Buddhist values, rejecting the traditional profit-oriented, consumer-driven aspect of television.

Early Broadcasts Using Modern Technology

Just as Buddhists in pre-modern China adopted the use of woodblock printing shortly after its creation, Chinese Buddhists in Taiwan after World War II also took advantage of mass media technology early on. One of the earliest uses of modern mass media by a Chinese Buddhist monk took place in 1950 when the Venerable Cihang 慈航 went on Taipei's Minben radio station (*Minben diantai* 民本電台) to give a Dharma talk on a Buddhist scripture, the *Pusa benhang jing* 菩薩本行徑. This was later followed in 1951 by the broadcast of a regular radio program by the Venerable Nanting 南亭 called "The Voice of Buddhism" (*Fojiao zhi sheng* 佛教之聲). In 1953, the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) established a Buddhist Dharma broadcasting division, which led the way to the use of radio for preaching during the 1950s by several Buddhist monks, starting in centers like Taipei and later spreading out to other cities on radio stations around Taiwan.

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[52] Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 2.

While television made its first broadcast in Taiwan in 1962, the earliest Buddhist usage of television in Taiwan did not take place, however, until 1979, when the Venerable Hsing Yun 星雲 and the Buddhist organization he established, Fo Guang Shan 佛光山 negotiated with CTS (Chinese Television System 華視), then one of only three government-owned television stations in Taiwan, to promote the Dharma through the program "Sweet Dew" (*Ganlu* 甘露). In the same year, Fo Guang Shan also broadcast "The Gate of Faith" (*Xin xin men* 信心門) on CTV (China Television 中視). Fo Guang Shan followed this with a program that ran on TTV (Taiwan Television 台視) from 1983 to 1986 called "The Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Buddhist Lectures" (*Hsing Yun dashi foxue jiangzuo* 星雲大師佛學講座). The former general manager of Taiwan Television gives his impression of these early Buddhist broadcasts in Hsing Yun's biography written by Zhiying Fu:

> As recalled by the former general manager of Taiwan Television, Shih Yung-kuei, Hsing Yun ought to be considered the first Dharma teacher to appear on the small screen in the history of television in Taiwan. "The Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Buddhist Lectures" dispelled the impression in most people's minds about how old monks would give dull Dharma talks with their eyes closed, for Hsing Yun was animated and lively. For a period of time, Taiwan Television, China Television, and Chinese Television were all running Hsing Yun's program series, with a degree of popularity that outshone popular entertainers.[53]

While Fo Guang Shan may perhaps have been the first Buddhist organization to obtain airtime on Taiwan's network television stations, other Buddhist organizations followed suit.

[53] Zhiying Fu, *Bright Star, Luminous Cloud: Life of a Simple Monk* (Hacienda Heights: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2008), 84.

Table 1. Buddhist Programs on Network Television in the 1980s

Buddhist Organization	Program	Network	Start Year
Buddhist Assoc. of the Republic of China (BAROC) 中國佛教會	*Guangming shijie* 光明世界	CTS (Chinese Television System) 華視	1980
Fo Guang Shan 佛光山	"The Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Buddhist Lectures" 星雲大師佛學講座	TTV (Taiwan Television) 台視	1983
Tzu Chi 慈濟	"Tzu Chi World" 慈濟世界	CTS (Chinese Television System) 華視	1985
Wan Fo Shan 萬佛山	*Da falun* 大法輪	TTV (Taiwan Television) 台視	1986
Wan Fo Shan 萬佛山	*Cai gen tan* 菜根譚	CTS (Chinese Television System) 華視	1988
Wenshu Fojiao Zhongxin 文殊佛教中心	*Xin ling zhi lu* 心靈之旅	TTV (Taiwan Television) 台視	1989

Table 1 above lists different Buddhist organizations that had programs broadcasted on network television in Taiwan during the 1980s[54]. While Buddhist organizations could raise the money to negotiate for and buy individual slots of time on network television, it was impossible for them to create their own television stations during the 1980s when Taiwan

[54] Shi Quen-Feng 釋泉峰 (Yen-ting Liao 廖晏霆), "佛衛電視慈悲台與生命電視台之比較研究 Religious Market and Religious Marketing: A Comparative Study on "Buddha Compassion TV Station" and "Live TV"" (M.A. Thesis, Nanhua University, 2009), 57. A more detailed list of Buddhist radio and television programs from 1964 to 2002 can be found in appendix 2 of the above thesis. See pp. 191-194.

was still under martial law and officially still limited to three government-owned network channels.[55]

The situation changed in 1993 when the Taiwanese government, just six years after lifting martial law in 1987, enacted the Cable Television Law, legalizing private cable television and ending the government's monopoly over the television airwaves. One intention behind the law was to curb and regulate the existence of illegal cable channels by having cable channel owners apply for government licenses to operate legally and to raise the standards for cable television operation. A major result of both the lifting of martial law and the enactment of the Cable Television Law was the reduction of state media censorship, the end of the state's dominance over television broadcasting, and an opening to the doors of intense competition between cable channels as stations vied for Taiwan's television viewing audience. Mayfair Yang, who conducted fieldwork on popular religion and media development in Taiwan in 2000 and 2001, made the following assessment of the television market after the enactment of the Cable Television Law that best describes the situation at the time:

> Taiwan's commercial television market has become the most intense in Asia, and its news stations have become ever more sensationalist to compete with one another for the small audience of 22 million viewers. The exuberant growth of cable and satellite stations in the mid-1990s made Taiwan the biggest cable television center in Asia.[56]

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[55] Unofficially, from the 1970s onward, several illegal cable channels called "fourth channels" existed, which broadcasted entertainment and information not found on the three government-owned network channels. A number of these fourth channels played bootleg versions of movies and entertainment from the U.S. and other countries as well as movies that were still playing in movie theaters. See Sophia Byrd, "Changing the "Fourth Channels: Taiwan Tunes in to a New Cable Television Law," *Pacific Rim & Policy Journal* Vol. 5 No. 3, (July 1996), 537-541.

[56] Mayfair Yang, "Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints," in *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 333.

This sensationalism led a number of Buddhist leaders to reflect on the negative situation of mass media usage in Taiwan and search for a Buddhist response. While opening the doors of cable television gave television-viewing audiences a greater freedom of viewing choices with so many cable stations starting to be available in the 1990s, it also gave Buddhist organizations the opportunity to create their own Buddhist channels and follow a path different from the established commercial one. As a result of the law, Buddhist organizations that raised enough money could also apply for a government license to operate their own cable television stations and this is what some Buddhist organizations started to do in the 1990s.

The first Buddhist cable station to go on air was started by the Venerable Xintian 心田 of Tainan in 1996. Originally called *Fojiao weixing dianshitai* 佛教衛星電視台, or Buddhist Satellite TV, the station's name was later changed to *Fowei dianshi cibeitai* 佛衛電視慈微台 or Buddha Compassion Television System (BTS). In 1997, two more Buddhist stations appeared – *Fajie weixing dianshitai* 法界衛星電視台, or Universal Culture Television UCTV, started by a lay Buddhist television producer, Xie Qingyi 謝清益, and *Fosheng weixing dianshitai* 佛聲衛星電視台 started by the Venerable Miaoguang 妙廣 of Taichung. However, *Fosheng weixing* ended operations in 1998 after the founder, Miaoguang, passed away. At the start of 1998, the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation 佛教慈濟基金會, led by the well-known nun, Venerable Cheng Yen 證嚴, launched Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV 慈濟大愛電視台. The Venerable Hsing Yun and the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist organization launched Buddha's Light Television *Foguang weixing*

佛光衛星 [now *Renjian weixing* 人間衛星 or Beautiful Life TV (BLTV)] in the same year. In 2003, a channel dedicated to the preaching of the Venerable Chin Kung 淨空, called Hwazan TV 華藏衛星電視台, was started by lay Buddhist Chen Cai Qiong 陳彩瓊. The last Buddhist cable station to start operations was Life TV (*Shengming dianshitai* 生命電視台) started by Master Hai Tao 海濤 in 2004.

Favorable Circumstances for Buddhist Television rather than Daoist Television

Taiwan is the only location in the world where six Buddhist cable television channels exist together at the same time on a basic cable television system of approximately 115 channels. The reasons for this are a suitable combination of economics, politics, and religious demographics. Demographically, Buddhism is the religion in Taiwan which the highest percentage of the population identifies with at 43.2%, followed by Daoism at 40.6%, Christianity at 4.8%, and Yiguandao at 4.3%.[57] Economically, Taiwan is an advanced industrial economy in which people who identify as Buddhists or are favorable to Buddhist activities make donations that allow for the growth of Buddhist organizations and the subsequent establishment of Buddhist hospitals and universities. Politically, as mentioned above, with the disappearance of martial law in the 1980s, the allowance for freedom of religion, and the privatization of cable television, the situation became favorable for Buddhist television to be established.

However, the same has surprisingly not been the case for Daoist television even though the difference in numbers between people self-identifying as Daoist and as Buddhist

[57] Percentages based on data from statistics of religion in Taiwan from the Department of Civil Affairs, Ministry of the Interior. See *Taiwan Yearbook,* (Taipei: Government Information Office, 2006), 339.

is minimal. One Daoist Television station, *Daotong Tiandi* 道通天地, was launched in 2004, but is based in Hong Kong. Plans for a Taiwan-based Daoist channel were announced in 2005, on May 28 through the Epoch Times and on May 29 through the Liberty Times, but the plans never came to fruition.[58] One possible factor for why Daoist stations in Taiwan have not blossomed relates to what Yunfeng Lu, Byron Johnson, and Rodney Stark have written of concerning the relationship between deregulation and the religious market in Taiwan. After the government's lifting of martial law in 1987 and the enactment of the Law on Civic Organization in 1989, Buddhist monks and nuns who did not want to follow the official Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC), broke off to form their own organizations. Lu, Johnson, and Stark argue that competition developed among religious groups to attract followers and this competition helped some Buddhist organizations, like Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan, and their devotees become more systematically organized into strong congregations in a way that did not exist among the Buddhist communities of the 1970s.[59] With the united power of donations from these strong congregations, Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan were able to launch expensive, large-scale projects such as the formation of Buddhist universities and television channels.

On the other hand, Daoist organizations in Taiwan have not been united in the training of priests or in the handling of ritual activities. According to Lee Fong-mao, there has long been a localization of Daoism in which Daoist shrines have been passed down through family lineage and attraction of membership was based on ethnic and geographic

[58] See http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/5/5/28/n936801.htm. Accessed August 12, 2017. See also http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/society/paper/20317. Accessed August 12, 2017.

[59] Yunfeng Lu, Byron Johnson, and Rodney Stark, "Deregulation and the Religious Market in Taiwan: A Research Note," in *The Sociological Quarterly* 49:1, (Winter, 2008), 144.

ties. As an example, concerning Daoism in the post-war era, Lee writes that "if we look at the distribution of domains in central Taiwan, we find that, generally speaking, the coastal, mountain, and Hakka regions still represent distinct Daoist areas and that the hierarchical relations defined by family tradition and teacher-disciple relationships continue to be respected."[60] There are Daoist associations centered around individual Daoist temples that manage the activities associated only with the particular temple. It is likely because of this localization or territorializing of spheres of influence by different Daoist shrines that there has not been enough pooling of resources by all Daoist supporters in Taiwan to launch and to maintain Daoist television channels. Instead, the local nature of Daoist shrine communities has allowed for the posting and maintenance of several websites based around the individual temple organizations. Stefania Travagnin notes that the major Daoist temple in Taipei, *Xingtian gong* 行天宮 has a website with information on the temple's activities and news. Recorded lectures and performances are posted on to the Xingtian YouTube channel.[61] Another Daoist temple, *Sanqing gong* 三清宮, does not have a YouTube channel, but does have a website that contains news and information of temple events as well as links to two videos on YouTube that show the temple and its activities.[62] Individual websites and

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[60] Philip Clart and Charles B. Jones, eds. *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 143.

[61] Travagnin, 54-55. Travagnin lists the website in a footnote: http://www.ht.org.tw (accessed August 12, 2017). The YouTube channel for Xingtian, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdOHcB186_InAcXGE2wWPTg/videos, contains videos, but none are "viral" in the sense of receiving thousands of views within a short amount time. After two months, a lecture posted on June 6, 2017 received 595 views.

[62] In addition to having information on the temple's history and activities, the website for *Sanqing gong*, http://www.sanching.org.tw/ (accessed August 13, 2017),

videos for Internet streaming are cheaper to create and maintain than a cable television channel. Buddhist organizations also use the Internet to spread Buddhist teachings and this will be discussed in Chapter Five.

II. Buddhist Television Channels in Taiwan and their Goals

Between 1996 and 2004, seven different Buddhist television stations came into operation in Taiwan along with one Christian channel, GOOD TV, in 1998. While one Buddhist channel ended operations in 1998, six stations remain in operation. These six stations follow one of two different strategies for broadcasting: (1) Spreading Buddhist teachings mainly through religious lectures or (2) following the precedent set my mainstream television and broadcasting using formats found on mainstream channels such as drama, talk show, and news. Four of the six Buddhist stations follow the former broadcasting path, making religious lecture the primary format for their programs – BTS, Life TV, Hwazan TV, and UCTV. The remaining two stations, Da Ai TV and BLTV, follow the precedent of mainstream television with a variety of formats. All six stations broadcast twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and are accessible on the Internet from anywhere in the world. Whether a station uses religious lecture as its main format or adoption of a variety of mainstream formats, the strategies adopted can all be traced back to Chinese Buddhist practices of propagation from the early twentieth century as well as pre-modern periods.

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contains links to two videos on YouTube posted by private individuals: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ6LXWPmn4M (accessed August 13, 2017) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IV1BQ4aCT0 (accessed August 13, 2017). Both videos show the scenery of the temple, while the latter also gives a description of the temple and its history in the style of a travel advertisement to attract visitors to the temple.

Buddha Compassion Television Station (BTS) 佛衛電視慈微台

BTS was started by Venerable Xintian (b. 1935) in 1996. Before television, Xintian preached on the radio starting in 1965. Before radio, he was preaching out on the streets in the countryside in the city of Tainan, spreading Buddhist stories through story-telling, singing, slide shows, and role playing in a question and answer dialogue format. With the introduction of television to Taiwan in 1962, Xintian thought of how great it would be to be able to use television to propagate Buddhism. However, with the political and economic limitations under martial law and with only three government-sanctioned television stations up through the 1980s, his dream of broadcasting on television would have to wait.

After the enactment of the 1993 Cable Television Law, Xintian saw starting a television station as a chance for the Buddhist community to unite for the sake of three goals: Dharma propagation, education, and service. In Dharma propagation, monks and nuns use television as a means to introduce Buddhism to non-Buddhist viewers with introductory teachings. With education, viewers who have a fundamental understanding of Buddhism can watch televised lectures at different broadcast times that teach more in-depth teachings related to specific schools and sutras. These lectures also serve as televised courses for a Buddhist college for both monastic as well as lay viewers. Service refers to using the television channel as a forum in which Buddhist communities can announce upcoming events or ceremonies at their temples. Different groups can make such on-air announcements free of charge, giving a date for their event and contact information for viewers to use – like a televised message board. Xintian's main goal was to spread the Buddhist doctrine and create a television platform on which different monks could share airtime in spreading the Dharma. With this goal, the main broadcast format for BTS is preaching through religious lecture to educate viewers on Buddhist doctrine.

BTS welcomes different monks and nuns, both young and old, who can preach in a non-sectarian fashion while avoiding any form of criticism, talk of government or politics, on-air alms-seeking, judgment of others, advertisement, and commercialism.[63] In choosing not to follow the model of commercial television, BTS does not accept advertisements for commercial products with the reason being that such advertising would conflict with their purpose of being a Buddhist channel that broadcasts for the genuine public good and not for the purpose of profit. While the expenses to operate the television station are over 7 million NT (~$216,000 US) per month, refusing to accept commercial advertising, means that they run on member donations.[64]

The main goal of BTS is to introduce and explain the Buddhist sutras, so the speakers that appear on the channel lecture on a variety of different Mahayana sutras. Revealed in a study done by Shi Quen Feng, the Buddhist teachings touched upon in one particular week on BTS included the *Huayan jiaohai* 華嚴教海, The Verses Delineating the Eight Consciousnesses (*bashi guiju song* 八識規矩） by Xuanzang (596-664 CE), the Thirty Verses on Consciousness Only (*Weishi sanshi song* 唯識三十頌） by Vasubandhu (fl. 4th cent. CE), the *Infinite Life Sutra* (*Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經), and the *Amitābha Sutra* (*Fo shuo amituo jing* 佛說阿彌陀經).[65] The television schedule for BTS the fourth week of July in 2015 showed programs expounding additional Buddhist teachings including Nagarjuna's (150-250 CE) *Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way* (*Zhongguanlun song* 中

[63] Quen-Feng 釋泉峰, 83.

[64] Ibid., 85.

[65] Ibid., 114-115.

觀論頌) as well as more popular Mahayana sutras, such as the *Śūraṅgama Sutra* (*Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經), the *Flower Garland Sutra* (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經), the *Lotus Sutra* (*Fahua jing* 法華經), the *Heart Sutra* (*Boreboluomiduoxin jing* 般若波羅蜜多心經), the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* (*Dizang jing* 地藏經), and the *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang jing* 金剛經).

While there are programs on the weekly schedule that are geared towards an introduction of Buddhism to new viewers, the bulk of the twenty-four hour a day programming, broken into one hour lecture programs, centers on in-depth explanations of sutras to viewers who already have a fundamental understanding of Buddhism. An example of this is the daily morning one-hour broadcast of the program "Dawn Rays On-Air Buddhist College 曉光空中佛學院." Broadcast Monday through Friday at 5:30 AM, each hour is allotted to a different monk lecturing on a particular sutra, serving as an on-air Buddhist college for viewers at home. On Friday mornings, the Buddhist College shows an episode of a lecture series by Venerable Cheng Guan 成觀, who lectures on the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. In this pre-recorded series, Cheng Guan covers one section of the sutra being discussed in each one-hour lecture. In lecture number 35, broadcast on the morning of October 9, 2015 Cheng Guan discussed the conversation in the sutra between the seventh century Chan monk, Huineng and the monk Fada. With the episode being a recording of Cheng Guan teaching a class of monks, he simply began the hour with, "We will continue looking at the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, page 52." He followed this by reading from the sutra and making explanations of certain phrases after he read throughout the hour. Such a program falls under the station's goal of education in being directed towards Buddhists who are looking for an in-depth understanding of Mahayana sutras. Cheng Guan's

audience in the program was made up of monks. The program itself as part of an "On-Air Buddhist College" is also directed towards monks and lay Buddhists who would want to attend a Buddhist college, but do not have the time. The program serves as part of a free correspondence college in which viewers can register as participating students and attain a diploma after passing an examination covering the three-year series of lectures.[66] This type of religious lecture format is continued throughout the day by different monks. On the television channel's weekly schedule, time is distributed evenly to different speakers with no monk or nun vastly standing out above the others.

With education as one of its foundational goals, what BTS has done with television for devout Buddhists is to change the medium from one of commercial entertainment into a medium that connects Buddhist preachers with audiences that would want to listen to Buddhist teachings but cannot attend temple sermons or Buddhist college lectures. The founder, Xintian, saw television as a tool that could amplify the message that monks had been traditionally preaching in the temples and streets. He responded to a question regarding the use of television in a 2007 interview saying:

> The power of influence of an eminent monk with great virtue is large, but how large? It can only be no more than for a few thousand or a few tens of thousands of people. But with this new technological method of propagating the Buddhist teachings, a few million people could be watching and listening. Not only can it let people of faith penetrate [the teachings] more deeply, but people who are not believers can also increase their understanding. Even people who oppose the teachings may become convinced.[67]

[66] Quen Feng, 96. Details for registration and participation in the on-air college program are found at the BTS website: http://rsbc.ehosting.com.tw/bts/student.htm. Accessed August 19, 2014.

[67] Quen-Feng 釋泉峰, 82.

In Xintian's frame of thinking, a monk continues to preach using his skills as an orator, but using modern technology as a tool, the monk's sermon would now potentially reach people who would never dream of walking into a temple's Dharma hall, but can come into contact with Buddhist teachings simply while watching television and channel flipping in the privacy of their own homes. The practice of giving a lecture would remain the same, but become amplified by technology that allows for the speaker's reach to stretch farther than the traditional temple Dharma hall.

While Xintian had grand visions of television being able to reach millions, the audience for BTS based on the lecture program formats is limited to people who are actively seeking knowledge of Buddhism in a classroom or temple setting, but do not have the time or the chance to physically attend. Television, for Buddhists who watch BTS, then is mainly a technical convenience of unidirectional communication for Buddhist educational purposes. Religious lecture is the chosen broadcasting format based on the experiences of Xintian with his years of preaching in the temple, on the radio, and on the streets. He shares the television platform with other monks whose experiences are also in traditional preaching.

Life TV 生命電視台

Life TV was started by Venerable Hai Tao (b. 1958) in 2004. Before Life TV, Hai Tao had already worked as the station chief at UCTV from 1997 to 1998 and for BTS from 2001 to 2003. Because of differences in strategies and views regarding Buddhist television broadcasting, Hai Tao left both stations to start his own Buddhist station. While the general goal of Life TV is the same as other Buddhist stations in propagating Buddhist teachings, the emphasis of Life TV is unique in focusing on the protection of life and living beings in all forms. Where BTS focuses on the education of monastics and lay Buddhists in in-depth explanation of sutras, the focus on Life TV is compassion through alleviating suffering, and

protecting and saving all forms of life including humans, animals, and even hungry ghosts. While there is a trend in modern Chinese Buddhism that shows in the other Buddhist channels of moving away from the supernatural or otherworldly elements of Buddhism and focusing on a "humanistic Buddhism" as advocated a century earlier by the Buddhist modernist monk Taixu (1890-1947), Life TV maintains a Buddhist view with open discourse that includes otherworldly elements, as its definition for compassion-for-all includes compassion for spirits.

An example of this open discourse and all-inclusive compassion was shown in a broadcasted lecture of Hai Tao entitled "Filial Piety and Compassion." The television program began in the middle of one of Hai Tao's temple lectures before a live audience in which he began by answering questions written by lecture attendees. In the first note read aloud by Hai Tao, the person wrote that he was troubled by an attacking or invading spirit and that participating in Buddhist Dharma assemblies were having no effect. He could not sleep at night and asked what form or recitation or practice would help make the spirit go away. After reading the note, Hai Tao replied:

> If it truly is a case of a "karmic creditor" (冤親債主) with grievances, you reciting mantras to drive it away won't work and it will be even more unwilling to leave. If it really is a karmic creditor with grievances, everyone needs to piously direct their prayers in front of the Buddha in repentance. Moreover, help the spirit take a Buddhist name. You draw up the name yourself. Continually help the spirit cultivate merit. You should release life and participate in Dharma assemblies and donate the accrued merit to the spirit…[68]

While the question was about how to solve the problem of the person's suffering purportedly caused by spiritual forces, Hai Tao's answer involved showing compassion for the spirit in question to solve the dilemma as well as doing acts of merit such as releasing

[68] Hai Tao, "孝順與慈悲 Filial Piety and Compassion," Televised Lecture, (Hsinchu, Taiwan), broadcast on Life TV October 13, 2015.

animals. Compassion in his answer therefore took three forms of releasing life from suffering – for the person who wrote the question, for the spirit causing the disturbance, and for animals caught for food that would hopefully be released by the person's future meritorious acts of releasing life. Where the discourse on spiritual forces and how to deal with them is generally avoided on other channels, Life TV openly addresses such matters in a way that utilizes Buddhist teachings that emphasize compassion for all forms of life.

While Life TV stands out in its open discourse concerning the spiritual side of Buddhism, the station has a policy similar to that of BTS in prohibitions related to topics such as politics and criticism related to sectarianism. Unlike most of the other Buddhist channels, which only have monks and nuns of the Chinese Mahayana tradition, the monks who speak on Life TV represent different Buddhist traditions including Tibetan Buddhism in lectures given by the Karmapa and other Tibetan monks, the Theravada tradition, and the Chinese Mahayana tradition from mainland China as well as Taiwan. The monk who speaks the most on Life TV, however, is the station's founder, Hai Tao who incorporates Tibetan Buddhist teachings together with Chinese Mahayana teachings. The emphasis of the station differs from that of BTS in that Hai Tao uses much of his airtime to speak on caring for and protecting life. Hai Tao's television lectures are recordings of sermons that he gives in his travels to various temple assemblies throughout Taiwan as well as in Chinese temple communities in countries around the world. I attended one such recorded temple assembly for a "Protection of Life" event in August 2013 in Hsinchu. The assembly took place under a large tented space in front of the temple. Hai Tao spoke from behind a flower-ornamented table on a stage at the front of the assembly while a television camera was situated in the middle of the audience to be able to record the speaker on the stage as well as pan around to capture the audience in attendance. In the afternoon, the assembly went to the beach nearby

to release hundreds of live fish that originally had been caught to be sold for food. The recorded events of the day were later put together for broadcast on television and distribution on DVD at Life TV's many free media distribution branches throughout Taiwan. In his broadcasts, Hai Tao teaches both the television audience and the live temple assembly in front of him about Buddhist teachings on topics such as compassion for all life, how to recite Buddhist prayers on different occasions for the well-being of living family members and acquaintances as well as the deceased, and being vegetarian. While Life TV does offer other program types such as cartoons, a vegetarian cooking show, and a news program on Buddhist activities, Hai Tao chooses to keep religious lecture as the main format and not broadcast Buddhist-related dramas on the scale of Da Ai TV or BLTV. In a 2007 interview, he gave his reason why:

> The movies that Fo Guang Shan broadcasts, they are like "Gone with the Wind." Or Tzu Chi's dramas, they all rely mainly on secular men and women. Internally, although it is a good method, it is not necessarily the Buddha Dharma. You have to at all times include the Dharma.[69]

For Hai Tao, the purpose of a monk is to preach the Dharma. And the best way to preach the Dharma is to follow the traditional path of Buddhist monks by saying directly what needs to be said. This can only be done directly by preaching. This is the reason Life TV maintains religious lecture as its main format. Where monks and nuns have long propagated Buddhism through temple sermons, the television acts as an extension of the temple sermon to becoming a living room sermon.

Additionally, for Hai Tao, his speaking sometimes involves the use of ritual implements and group chants while he speaks. Listening to a lecture then is not simply

[69] Quen-Feng, 124.

listening, but also participating in ritual. In one broadcasted lecture recorded in Taichung, the program began by showing Hai Tao leading the audience in a group ritual prayer involving singing prayers and the names of the Buddha Amitabha and bodhisattva Guanyin and praying for health, protection, safety, world peace, wisdom, and a path towards buddhahood for people suffering in the world, for people in the assembly, their relatives, ancestors, spirits, and all people in society.[70] Buddhist devotees watching the program on television at home could potentially then follow along and pray together with Hai Tao as if they were sitting in the assembly.

The cost of running Life TV is comparable to the cost of BTS with Life TV also running other projects including releasing life events and sutra printing projects. In a 2007 interview, Hai Tao explained Life TV's strategy for operations based on his calculation of the costs and where the income would come from:

> We do have a great burden in making our station. The cost of operating a television station each month is 10 million NT (~$307,700 US). Releasing life activities each month is 7 to 8 million NT. Printing sutras each month is 5 million NT. Where will that come from? Then I thought, the answer will come according to karma. I told everyone we all follow the principles of karma together. When handling affairs, we should do the right thing. If we can achieve this result, then it means we only need to cultivate compassion and we will get good results. All of our lives we believe firmly that you don't have to overthink it and afterwards we got the proof of this. In the past few years, we happened to have not been lacking of money. And from now on we do not have this problem. We don't have to go and find a way to raise money. You just have to compassionately do what needs to be done. The Eight Classes of Demigods and Semidevils (天龍八部) and the Three Treasures will all help you arrange it well. So, at this point we do what we do with confidence.[71]

Hai Tao bases his operations on the Buddhist notion of karma – of doing what is right and eventually obtaining the fruit of the meritorious act. In the case of television, what he

[70] Broadcast on Life TV on October 13, 2015.

[71] Quen-Feng, 132.

believes to be right is using television to propagate Buddhism, which is a meritorious act that will karmically reap the rewards to keep it going.

Although the costs for running a television station are high, Hai Tao, like Xintian at BTS, refuses to sell commercial time. Hai Tao bases his refusal for using commercials on the Buddhist teachings themselves, even referring to Buddhist teachings regarding Buddhism and commerce in a 2007 interview:

> I believe religion absolutely cannot be bought and sold. Stupas cannot be bought and sold. The cultural relics of the Three Treasures [the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha] cannot be bought and sold. The buying and selling of Buddhist images, Buddhist sutras are all actions to go to hell for. What is written in the scriptures is clear. The buying and selling of father and mother, the buying and selling of the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha – the Three Treasures [of Buddhism] are out of the question.[72]

There are a number of Buddhist sources that Hai Tao may be referring regarding commercial prohibition for Buddhists. In one text, for example, *Fo shuo mulian wen jie luzhong wubai jing zhongshi* 佛說目連問戒律中五百輕重事, commercial prohibition for monks is highlighted in a dialogue in which the monk Maudgalyayana asks the Buddha about monastic discipline and the Buddha responds:

> He asks: 'What is the crime committed by a bhiksu (Buddhist monk) for selling images of the Buddha?'
> [The Buddha] answers: 'The same crime as the selling of father and mother.'[73]

Hai Tao's answer is based on such texts that draw a line between what Buddhists can and cannot do in television operation, which means not running the operation as a for-profit enterprise and not selling commercial time to advertisers. While the original Vinaya rules for

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[72] Quen Feng, 133.

[73] T1483, p. 973c. For more examples of Buddhist Vinaya rules that forbid the selling of Buddhist images, see Erik Zurcher, *Buddhism in China: Collected papers* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 496-497.

monks could not specify uses of modern technology such as television, monks like Hai Tao have interpreted the rules to include television, since it is a medium in which images of the Buddha can appear. He acts accordingly with the prohibition of using television as a business enterprise and only accepting donations. The scale of production will then completely depend on the number of donations they receive.[74] Following Heidi Campbell's framework for the religious social-shaping of technology, Hai Tao's interpretation of the established Buddhist rules for monks conditions the usage of television to make it acceptable to the established Buddhist rule of separating the Buddha from commercial activity. Running on donations is a long-established Buddhist tradition and therefore acceptable for the operation of television.

The ongoing need for donations requires Hai Tao to encourage viewers to support Life TV through on-air messages to the audience in between programs. Often at breaks between programs where a mainstream channel would have commercial advertisements, Life TV displays postings of upcoming Dharma assemblies throughout Taiwan and video clips asking viewers to continue supporting Life TV. In one clip, in which Hai Tao himself appears, he says to television viewers and Life TV supporters:

> There are those who watch Life TV and support Life TV. They come to our homes and collect 100 NT ($3 US). In a month, they collect 1000 NT ($30 US). We see these great bodhisattvas. They are living bodhisattvas. We praise them. But we also hope everyone can participate in this way of being a protecting bodhisattva. Why? Because as long as Life TV exists, it can do more and more good, have better content, and fill the whole world with love – releasing life, stopping killing, feeding hungry ghosts, saving stray dogs, helping everyone learn Buddhism. This is all because Life TV's content is extensive. So, with everyone continuously maintaining and participating in Life TV, we can buy even better equipment, and create even more animations and cartoons to promote Buddhism to the whole world. And this world can be saved. So, Life TV's merits are really very big. Everyone's merits of

[74] Quen Feng, 135.

> maintaining Life TV are even bigger. So, at all times care for and protect Life TV. *Amitofo*![75]

In Hai Tao's short message asking for donations, he exemplifies Buddhist volunteers who have helped raise funds and he lists all of Life TV's main projects regarding saving life – releasing animal life caught for food, saving stray dogs, and initiating rituals for feeding hungry ghosts. A single viewer can donate as little as 100 NT or help to collect and donate up to 1000 NT or more. The act of donation is not simply an act to help keep the television station running, but the donation for Buddhist television also serves as a traditional Buddhist act of donation to accumulate merit.

This traditional act of donation is connected to another established temple practice. People that donate to support the station, do so to support Life TV's television goals, but also do so as an act of Buddhist donation in which monks and nuns of Life TV give blessings to the donors during ritual ceremonies. One casual viewer and resident of Taipei, Lichen Shen, age 46, who I first met in going to a Buddhist meditation retreat together, describes her donation to Life TV by saying, "I donate 1000 or 500 (NT). I give the name to them. They bless us during the ceremony… It's the same as any temple. People donate the money and the master gives blessings." [76] So, for Ms. Shen, her donation to Life TV serves two purposes – to support the continued broadcasts of the television station but also to act as a means of attaining blessings from monastic rituals performed by the monks and nuns of the Life TV organization. In Buddhist donation projects from dynastic China to contemporary Taiwan, the names of donors could be printed within the books of a printing project or on tablets to be placed somewhere on the temple grounds of a temple building or renovation

[75] Broadcast on Life TV October 12, 2015.

[76] Interview, October 6, 2015.

project. For Life TV, the names of donors for the television station are shown on television each day at different intervals during breaks between programs.

Where the audience for BTS may be limited to viewers specifically seeking an education in Buddhist doctrine, Life TV's somewhat broader scope that includes the use of animation and topics on prayers and rituals for protecting and blessing practitioners and family members makes Life TV potentially more attractive to a larger audience base. These are some of the reasons another Taipei resident, Mei Liu, age 42, watches Life TV. According to Ms Liu:

> On Life TV, they'll tell stories that are very easy to understand. And when I go home and watch television, maybe I'll watch a whole hour or maybe I'll just watch for thirty minutes, so if I listen to Life TV, I'll feel very relaxed and I won't think anything about it… It's just like a very simple story, a popular story.[77]

For Ms. Liu, the appeal of Hai Tao's lectures is that they are very clear and have simple messages embedded in easy to understand stories. When asked about whether she watches the other Buddhist channels, Ms. Liu responded:

> Yes, I know those television stations, but they're too serious. It's very serious in telling about Buddhist scriptures. They're not popular like stories. A word [from them] may have many, many meanings. So, I have to think about it. It's different. Sometimes Life TV will have cartoons. So, it's very simple… I like the cartoons. So, that's why I will watch Life TV. I don't have to think anything. I just watch for the stories. [78]

Based on her answer, Ms. Liu would not watch BTS because of its serious tone on scriptural education, but watches Life TV for its broader appeal that uses visuals through animation and entertaining stories that carry simple Buddhist messages concerning compassion for all beings.

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[77] Interview August 9, 2014.

[78] Ibid.

Hwazan Satellite TV 華藏衛星電視台

Venerable Chin Kung (b. 1927) of the Pure Land Buddhist tradition does all of the preaching on Hwazan TV, which is accessible on satellite television in Asia, Australia, Europe, the Americas, and South Africa in addition to being on Taiwanese cable television and on the Internet. Each lecture program is a video of Chin Kung sitting very simply before a video camera, lecturing on different Buddhist topics and sutras including the *Flower Garland Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Śūraṅgama Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, and the Pure Land Buddhist teachings among others. Along with UCTV, Hwazan TV differs from most of the other Buddhist television stations in that it was not founded by the Buddhist monk who speaks on the channel, but rather by a devout follower of the Buddhist master. Chen Cai Qiong (Judy Chen), the president of Hwazan TV, started the satellite television station after Chin Kung brought up the matter with her, telling her he had a dream to use television for Dharma propagation for over thirty years. Using her knowledge and experience from having worked in the newspaper industry in the United States and her financial resources coming from a wealthy family, Chen kick started the project of creating Hwazan TV, which began broadcasting at the beginning of 2003. Because Chin Kung's many followers are willing to donate money towards broadcasting his teachings, he not only appears on Hwazan TV for most of a twenty-four-hour daily schedule, but also appears on some of the other Buddhist channels as well as on non-Buddhist cable channels that offer paid airtime for private programs.

Chin Kung's strategy for the use of television is based on how he sees the state of mass media usage together with how he sees the state of education in the world and what he as a monk can do with his abilities to propagate Buddhism. He expressed his views on the

state of mass media in a talk given on education at an inter-religious meeting in Indonesia in 2004:

> Currently social education is severely contaminated. Just look at the daily newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, and materials supplied by the Internet. Much of their content teaches how to kill, steal, lie, and encourage people to have indecent yearnings. They have neglected the teachings of the principle of causality. People are concerned only about their own interests. There is little kindness, gratitude, or loyalty in human relationships.[79]

Chin Kung's view of the state of mass media and its negative effects on society are shared by a number of Buddhist leaders including Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan and Cheng Yen of Tzu Chi, which will be detailed below. According to this view, mass media in all of its modern forms caters to human desires for violence, sex, and materialistic acquisition without considering the consequences of these desires on human relations with each other or with the environment. For Chin Kung, it is the human relationships of kindness, loyalty, and gratitude that are eroded as a result of the current state of mass media broadcasting.

His answer is for all religions to use television to emphasize teachings that would bring out the good qualities in people. He sees his own actions of recording lectures and broadcasting those lectures on television and making them accessible through print and other media resources as serving as a model to follow. He shared this view in a talk given during the 10th Okayama NGO Summit for International Contribution in Japan on January 25th, 2004:

> Religious education is very important to world peace. In order to implement religious education, I give lectures on Buddhist sutras and have them recorded, copied and have an enormous number of audio and videocassette tapes, CDs and DVDs made for worldwide free distribution. Now my lectures are broadcast via Satellite TV… I already have about 20,000 lecture hours recorded on audio and videotapes. If

[79] Chin Kung, "Education is Essential in Building a Country and in Guiding its People" (Jakarta, Indonesia February 22, 2004) in *Understanding the Concept of "One Living Entity,"* 36. Online address: www.amtb.tw/pdf/25-15.pdf . Accessed Oct. 30, 2015.

> broadcast continuously for 24 hours a day, these materials would last for two years… Each religion should set up its own special channel of broadcast, TV or otherwise, inviting 20 to 30 lecturers of morality to explain their own religious scriptures or teachings and have them broadcasted 24 hours a day to their followers and students, to remind them daily that they need to purify their minds.[80]

Chin Kung's usage of satellite television as well as the Internet is a continuation of the propagation activities that he has participated in that stretch back to 1961 when he was a member of the Propagating Teachings Committee during his time as an instructor at Shipu Temple in Taipei.

He considers television to be "the Buddhist temple of the 21st century."[81] This notion of television serving as a temple is shared by UCTV as well, transforming television from a medium of commercial entertainment to a medium of religious propagation that transforms not simply the medium of the television itself, but the space in which the sound of the medium (the voice of the monastic speaker) can be heard in people's living rooms. A living room space becomes transformed into an extended temple space as viewers listen to the monk on television just as they would if they were sitting in the temple assembly. They can also chant and pray along with ritual ceremonies that are broadcast on the Buddhist stations, giving the "televised Buddhist temple" all of the functions of a brick-and-mortar temple.

While Hwazan TV and Chin Kung do not stand out as the first names to represent Taiwanese Buddhism as much as Cheng Yen of Tzu Chi or Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan, his influence does stretch to Chinese communities worldwide. Chin Kung's vast collection of sermons and teachings have been influential in Buddhist communities of mainland China

[80] Ibid., 49.

[81] Ibid., 55.

where books, CDs, and DVDs of his teachings can be found at temples throughout China.[82] In Taiwan, his name came up more than a few times in my interviews with informants when asked which shows or masters they watched. The owner of a small vegetarian establishment that I sometimes ate at, Fanyi Chang, age 47, was one such viewer who watched a combination of Hwazan TV and Life TV. When asked about why she watches Hwazan, she replied:

> The reason I chose to watch Hwazan is because of Master Chin Kung. He is excellent in his lectures. He gets into deep meanings. There are a lot of difficulties in life, but you just need to watch these Buddhist programs that help you penetrate the meanings. You can get out of your suffering and find happiness.[83]

For Mrs. Chang, the importance of Buddhist television in general and Hwazan TV specifically is in its ability to help people alleviate their suffering and understand the teachings of Buddhism. According to Mrs. Chang, she would not understand the meaning of different Buddhist sutras if she read them herself, so she depends on the explanations of the masters to penetrate their meaning. Mrs. Chang's reasons for watching Hwazan TV, differ from Ms. Liu's reasons above for watching Life TV, but both depend on hearing a monk on television preach. The monks who preach Buddhism on television act as intermediaries of Buddhist knowledge. Monks and nuns themselves are mediums by which the Buddha Dharma become transmitted to lay people, but now television and other forms of modern technology act as an additional layer of media through which people can be introduced to Buddhism and can be made to understand the Buddhist scriptures.

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[82] During Buddhism's revival in mainland China in the 1980s, Chin Kung established a Buddhist Education Foundation to print Buddhist scriptures and his own teachings for dissemination, giving him respect among the Buddhist laity in mainland China and influencing the discourse of Buddhism based on his teachings. See Gareth Fisher, *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 147.

Mrs. Chang's first two sentences in her answer explain why certain Buddhist stations may stand out above the others – appeal of the speaker. In a Buddhist television environment with six stations to choose from, it is the appeal of the speaker based on the speaker's attributes as an excellent lecturer, such as Chin Kung, or a good storyteller, such as Hai Tao, that draw viewers to a particular channel. Monks on BTS and UCTV also expound deep meanings from the sutras, but informants that I encountered never mentioned the names of any monks from those stations. Because Chin Kung is judged as an excellent teacher by many viewers and is tireless in his preaching, recording, and distribution of teachings, he stands out over the monks and nuns on BTS and UCTV.

Universal Culture Television (UCTV) 法界衛星電視台

UCTV was started privately by a lay Buddhist, the station's president and general manager, Xie Qingyi in 1997. Similar to the purpose of the Buddhist stations above, the purpose of creating UCTV was to create a television platform from which Buddhist preachers could propagate the Buddhist teachings. Unique to UCTV is that the station was started independently of any monastic organization. Xie Qingyi's creation of UCTV for Dharma propagation is a devotional act of a lay practitioner to help spread Buddhism similar to the donations made by wealthy patrons towards the establishment of temples and monasteries throughout Chinese Buddhist history. The difference with Xie's act is that Buddhist monks are given an entire television station to work with in propagating the Dharma. While Hwazan TV was also started by a lay practitioner, that station has only been devoted to the preaching of one monk, Chin Kung. UCTV resembles BTS in having several monks share airtime.

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[83] Interview, July 24, 2013.

The weekly television schedule for UCTV looks similar to that of BTS with a variety of different monks lecturing on Mahayana Buddhist sutras at different times throughout the day in one hour or half hour segments. On the weekly schedule for the month of August of 2015, there were approximately thirty different monks listed on the television schedule giving lectures on Buddhist sutras similar to those listed above for BTS such as the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Śūraṅgama Sutra*, and various lectures on Mahayana Buddhism in general. Also similar to BTS is the goal of making it easier for people with busy lives, who cannot go to a temple, to have access to the Buddhist teachings. According to a statement displayed on UCTV's website:

> Dharma World Dharma Propagating Satellite Television (法界弘法衛星電視台) is a television station initiated to propagate the Buddha Dharma. Our hope is to sufficiently display our greatest capabilities to allow many living bodhisattvas who are busy working in industrial and commercial society as well as Dharma disciples studying Buddhism to be spared from running about north and south to get to Buddhist centers. They can instead listen to the most excellent Buddha Dharma in their own living rooms. The "Grand Dharma World Living Room Buddha Hall" allows for the "enlivening of the Buddha Dharma." It makes the Buddha Dharma thoroughly a concrete practice in our lives.[84]

Like the reasons for Xintian's founding of BTS, UCTV was initiated with the purpose of making it easier for people to hear the Dharma without extensive travel. And like Chin Kung's vision for television to become the 21st century Buddhist temple, the idea of UCTV's "Living Room Buddha Hall" transforms the living room into a Buddhist center and a sacred space, bringing the teachings of the Buddha to life right in one's private home. While more will be said on sacred space in the fourth chapter, the emphasis here is on the convenience that television brings to peoples' busy working lives. In an ideal situation, people would go to the temple to hear the Dharma preached. However, in a modern

[84] "法界為台灣宗教之創始電視台," 法界衛星電視台 Universal Culture Television. http://www.uctv.com.tw/node/1. Accessed Aug. 23, 2015.

industrial society, the thinking on the part of the monastic community is that many people are too busy and too tired after work to drive to a temple. So, the next best thing would be to bring the temple into the homes of the people. This is the reason monks preach in a lecture style on television – to bring the traditional practices and teachings of the temple into the home. And along with the other Buddhist stations, UCTV uses a mix of both Mandarin and Taiwanese with some monks lecturing purely in Mandarin or purely in Taiwanese while Chinese subtitles are displayed below the speaker.

What UCTV lacks, however, is the strong appeal of a leading monastic figure. In Julia Huang's study of Tzu Chi, she emphasizes the charisma or the magnetic attraction that Tzu Chi's founder, Cheng Yen, has for the members of Tzu Chi, giving her a strong appeal.[85] A charismatic leading figure is absent on UCTV. Where Hai Tao stands out on Life TV with his simple and popular stories and where Chin Kung stands out in appeal to viewers for similar reasons of excellence in speaking, UCTV does not have any standout speakers that draw as much attention as Hai Tao or Chin Kung or Cheng Yen. While the monks and nuns that speak on UCTV are given equal airtime, none has the appeal of the speaker that draws viewers to Chin Kung on Hwazan TV, Hai Tao on Life TV, or Cheng Yen on Da Ai TV. Started from a private source, UCTV also does not have the backing of an organization or foundation the way that Hwazan TV does through the many Pure Land Buddhist associations that support Chin Kung or the way Da Ai TV does with the Tzu Chi Foundation and its large number of members.

While the Buddhist stations discussed above depend on viewer and member donations for their continued operation, UCTV, which also depends on viewer and lay

[85] Julia Huang, *Charisma and Compassion: Cheng Yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Movement*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 29-33.

Buddhist support, moves their strategy of operational income closer to commercial practices with commercials for a limited number of products created by the UCTV organization itself. These products include CDs of Buddhist songs as well as an original brand body wash, body lotion, and shampoo ordered and created by UCTV for sale for the express purpose of raising money for television expenses. Where a normal shampoo commercial would simply advertise a product that viewers can go to retail stores to buy, the commercials for shampoo and CDs advertised on UCTV end with a telephone number and contact information for viewers to directly contact UCTV to make an order. While these advertisement spots may be classified as commercial advertising, it is of an extremely limited form in which there is no outside influence on television programming. There is no separate body wash and shampoo corporation that makes demands on what content UCTV should show. The advertisements come from UCTV itself, ensuring all proceeds go to the continued operation of the Buddhist station. Protecting the goals of the station from outside commercial influence is a characteristic shared by all of Taiwan's Buddhist stations.

Beautiful Life Television (BLTV) 人間衛視

Together with Da Ai TV, BLTV is one of the two Buddhist television stations that does not broadcast religious lectures as the majority of its programming. Started by Hsing Yun (b. 1927) and the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist organization in 1998, BLTV is a mix of television formats including a news program, historical dramas, talk shows and documentaries on art and culture. In addition to being on cable television in Taiwan, BLTV broadcasts on satellite television in Asia, North America, and by streaming Internet through its online website. Hsing Yun had a fourfold reasoning for establishing a television station: (1) Carrying on the principles of the Buddha's Dharma preaching; (2) taking on the responsibility of social transformation; (3) elevating the quality of people's faith; and (4)

promoting harmony with family life. The emphasis of three of these goals lies not in preaching Buddhism, but in spreading a positive culture in what Hsing Yun sees as a mass media environment dominated by negative images. This was Hsing Yun's goal in establishing a Buddhist-based television channel – not simply to serve as a platform for Buddhist propagation, but to serve as a tool to emphasize moral character in the culture and arts of everyday life. In Hsing Yun's biography, he states:

> In this age of technology and moral decline, we need positive broadcasters who can awaken positive moral ideas; and in this ever-changing age of information, we need top-quality broadcasters who can pass on top-quality cultural information. Buddha's Light Television is taking on this important task of social purification and transformation.[86]

For this purpose of moral and cultural enrichment, Hsing Yun started both a television station and a newspaper before that, understanding the potential power and the reach of mass media and its influence on individuals:

> We hope that as people open their newspapers during breakfast each morning, they will not always be reading reports of desire, hatred, and corrupt ideas; and we hope that as people watch the news reports on TV before going to bed, they will not always be seeing such barbarous behavior as murder, robbery, brutality! We know that although this saha world of ours is dark, we can certainly come across some fragrant plants for every ten steps we take; and during each day, the time the sun is out is still more than the night is long. [87]

Hsing Yun's position on the state of mass media resembles Chin Kung's position above in seeing mass media as being filled with negativity. For Hsing Yun, as for Chin Kung, the answer to combat these negative images put forth by a sensationalist media is to put forth positive images. For Chin Kung, that means using television to directly preach the meaning of Buddhist sutras in programs twenty-four hours a day for viewers to be morally influenced.

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[86] Fu, 327.

[87] Ibid., 325.

For Hsing Yun, that means using television in a manner similar to mainstream television with news and talk shows and the like, but without any of the negative sensationalism that has long been attached to those program types. In that way, BLTV sees itself as a lotus flower in muddy water. "That purity and cleanness of a lotus symbolizes a non-polluted TV channel."[88] The lotus flower, which is a Buddhist symbol of purity, becomes an extended Buddhist symbol for purity in a muddy modern mass media.

Among BLTV's different format types, the only religious lecture program is a one hour program called "BLTV Buddhist College 人間佛學院," broadcast once in the morning and once in the evening. On the program, monks and nuns of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist organization lecture on Mahayana Buddhist teachings and sutras. While Hsing Yun himself no longer gives new lectures to be broadcast during the lecture hour because of health conditions at age 88 at the time of this writing, BLTV does sometimes broadcast Hsing Yun's earlier lectures. And throughout the day, short Buddhist sayings from Hsing Yun that can be applied to daily life are displayed in between programs.

While BLTV's first mission of "carrying on the principles of the Buddha's Dharma preaching" is the same as that of the other Buddhist stations, there is a slight difference with their development of four tracks for "a youthful orientation, an educational orientation, globalization, and a public welfare orientation."[89] One example of programming meant to attract young people as a part of the youthful orientation is the broadcast of the annual International Fo Guang Cup Collegiate Basketball Invitational Tournament that BLTV

[88] Beautiful Life Television. "關於人間." www.bltv.tv/about/. Accessed May 29, 2017.

[89] Fu, 327-328.

broadcasts live every July. College basketball teams from different countries (mostly Asian countries including mainland China so far) are invited to play in a tournament with Fo Guang University's college basketball teams. While showing a basketball tournament on a Buddhist television channel may appear strange, according to Hsing Yun, basketball is a way to open a path towards friendship and exchange and create bridges across nations that can work together towards world peace.[90] During the equivalent of commercial breaks during the basketball broadcast were short videos that introduced BLTV's various programs as well as videos of Hsing Yun himself at locations around Fo Guang Shan's temple in Kaohsiung, giving short life lessons. In one such 40-second segment with soothing background music Hsing Yun spoke saying:

> The most valuable things are life and faith. It is difficult to change others. Instead, change oneself. We must do good deeds with our bodies, say good words with our mouths, think good thoughts in our minds. True wisdom is being able to view the universe and human life with a thorough, deep understanding. So, let us widen our web of good affinities. With benevolent connections, one can accomplish great things.[91]

After his words, the screen displayed the title "Auspicious Beginnings of Peace and Harmony" followed by a message at the bottom of the screen: "BLTV would like to join you in creating a wonderful world." Included in the basketball broadcast were short snippets of Buddhist teachings embedded into the video breaks. Both BLTV and Da Ai TV share this strategy of using mainstream formats embedded with Buddhist teachings. This is the same strategy used by Buddhists of the pre-modern periods through adapting miracle tale

[90] Hsing Yun's words during the closing ceremony to the 2014 Fo Guang Cup International Collegiate Invitational Basketball Tournament in Kaohsiung. Live broadcast on BLTV, July 7, 2014.

[91] Broadcast during breaks in the 2014 Fo Guang Cup International Collegiate Invitational Basketball Tournament on BLTV, July 7, 2014.

collections and morality books. The medium has changed, but the adoptive strategy is the same.

What both BLTV and Da Ai TV, discussed below, also share is the backing of a large Buddhist organization with a huge active membership base. BLTV is the creation of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist organization, which has an active community of supporters in the lay organization Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA). In 2004, Stuart Chandler, writing on Hsing Yun and Fo Guang Shan, estimated the number of active members in BLIA in Taiwan to be between 400,000 and 600,000 members, or 8-12 percent of Taiwan's total Buddhist population.[92] With donations from lay devotees being the main source of income, followed by projects in tourism and pilgrimage, and sales of books and media from Fo Guang Publishing House, a conservative 1996 estimate put the "Fo Guang Shan empire" at a worth of more than $400 million US dollars. This more than supports BLTV's annual budget, which in 1998 was over $350 million NT (~$11,600,000 US). [93] While Zhiying Fu, author to Hsing Yun's biography, states that more than half of BLTV's viewers are not Buddhist, a survey conducted by Bi Ying in 2002 of Fo Guang Shan members showed that more than half of the surveyed members chose to watch BLTV over other Buddhist channels, reflecting the support that members of the Buddhist organization give to BLTV. A 56-year-old BLIA volunteer working at a bookstore in Fo Guang Shan's Taipei branch proudly told me during one of my visits that BLTV was the only channel she watched on television at all, saying of BLTV, "It changes your thinking. It helps in the self-

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[92] Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: the Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 266.

[93] Ibid., 224-226.

cultivation of your character and your behavior."[94] The talk with her impressed in me the amount of loyalty that members of Fo Guang Shan had to the organization.

Da Ai TV 慈濟大愛電視台

Started by the venerable nun Cheng Yen (b. 1937) and the Tzu Chi Buddhist organization, Da Ai TV has a weekly schedule that looks much like that of a mainstream commercial channel made up of dramas, news, documentaries, talk shows on health, arts, and culture, as well as children's programs. In addition to cable television in Taiwan, Da Ai TV also broadcasts on satellite television to Asia, Europe, the Americas, Australia, and South Africa. According to a brochure obtained from the Tzu Chi Culture Center in Taipei, Da Ai TV creates most of its own programs with the intent to "change the world through media and provide clean wholesome contents that would uplift and inspire people."[95] Without first paying attention to the content of the programs, at first glance the formats for the programs look much like that of commercial television program formats in terms of morning, midday, and evening news, talk shows, and dramas. Da Ai TV resembles mainstream television so much so that when I asked a neighbor during my first stay in Taipei if she could fill out a questionnaire on Buddhist television programs, telling her that she could include her opinions on Da Ai dramas, her immediate response was, "Oh. Da Ai dramas count as Buddhist too?"

Her question implied that because the Da Ai dramas and other Da Ai programs did not have an overt Buddhist presence with monks preaching, she classified the Da Ai dramas

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[94] Interview, November 30, 2013.

[95] 大愛電視 *Da Ai Television* (Taipei: Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation), 2.

she watched as simply programs like those on any other mainstream station. The difference between commercial programs and the Da Ai programs lies in the purpose and the content. While commercial programs are created with the intent to make profit, Da Ai TV, working as a non-profit organization, creates and broadcasts programs with the Buddhist intent of changing peoples' lives for the better. Cheng Yen made this clear at the start of Da Ai TV in the opening to a *Da Ai* quarterly publication in 1998:

> Today, a majority of media sources have exposed society's problems and deficiencies in tremendous detail. It is true that this satisfies the public's right to know, but viewers have even more right to obtain good information. We believe that bad comes from infecting with bad while goodness comes from inspiring with goodness. It is Da Ai Television's unbreakable commitment to report good actions that are warm and touching by people who quietly devote themselves, supplying information that has morals for our time and is favorable to people's hearts.
>
> Da Ai TV has no bloody violence. There is only mutual aid and mutual affection. There is no provocative entertainment. There is only a pure sense of comfort. Our television station is not only a place where talented television professionals display their good capabilities to achieve their dreams, but it is also the best choice for our viewing friends. Through television, which can broadcast efficiently, we hope that Tzu Chi seeds of love can spread even further, spreading more quickly to each family and get planted into each person's heart in order to reach the goal of having an auspicious and peaceful society.[96]

Based on her belief that goodness inspires goodness, Cheng Yen believes television should be used as a means to inspire good in people by only showing actions and stories with good intent and a good message, similar to the reasoning for both Chin Kung and Hsing Yun above. With the restriction of showing no violence and no provocative entertainment, Da Ai takes the established commercial formats of television with its news and dramas and adapts them to Buddhist oriented goals of creating a peaceful society.

[96] Shi Cheng Yen 釋證嚴, "*Wei 'Da Ai' zuo jianzheng* 為「大愛」作見證," 大愛 *Da Ai*, Spring 1998, 2.

The importance of projecting a positive image through television translates into very minor details of what gets shown on screen as Mengyi Jian, a freelance program planner working for Da Ai TV on a farming documentary program, shared with me:

> In working on Da Ai programs, there are rules. For example, you can't show bare skin. You can't show people not wearing clothes, because there are a lot of farmers working out in the fields who don't wear shirts because they're too hot, but that's not good [for TV]. Another thing that can't be shown is tattoos. Maybe someone can have them, but they can't be shown in the program. Also, men can't have long hair… Men should have short and neat hair. And in their programs, you will not be able to see people smoking. Also, in the programs, if there is any showing of food or people eating, that kind of thing, you cannot show meat. These are things that are different from other TV companies.[97]

Da Ai TV's strict rules for what does not get shown on television align with Tzu Chi's ideals for its members. Where vegetarianism is an ideal to follow in Tzu Chi, avoiding showing anyone eating meat on television prevents influencing viewers into such activities or giving viewers any impression that Tzu Chi condones such activities. The same applies for the television portrayal of people's appearance and habits. Where Tzu Chi has a code for how their own Tzu Chi volunteers are to dress and behave in order to uphold the same values and aims towards a Tzu Chi view of a clean and pure society, those ideals translate into television as not showing anyone smoking and not showing men with tattoos and long hair, but showing them instead with short, neat hair.[98]

The programs that are identified specifically with religion and spirituality on Da Ai TV are all led by Cheng Yen. In "Wisdom at Dawn" (*Jingsi chenyu* 靜思晨語), a half hour program, Cheng Yen examines verses and lines from the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Immeasurable*

[97] Interview, June 7, 2014.

[98] For more details on Tzu Chi's codes for dress and behavior, see Yu-Shuang Yao, *Taiwan's Tzu Chi as Engaged Buddhism,* (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2012), 170-171. See also C. Julia Huang, *Charisma and Compassion: Cheng yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Movement*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 66-77, 109-113.

Meanings Sutra and applies the teachings from the Buddhist sutras to people's lives. She discusses social issues from a Buddhist perspective in a weekly one-hour program called "The Essence of Bodhi Mind" (*Puti xinyao* 菩提心要), connecting disasters and situations of suffering that occur around the world in current events with the suffering taught of in Buddhism and the need for people to act with compassion to help alleviate the suffering felt by others. A daily twelve-minute program called "Life Wisdom" or "*Renjian puti* 人間菩提" highlights the main points of Cheng Yen's daily speech given during the morning one-hour assembly with Tzu Chi volunteers from Tzu Chi's headquarters in Hualien. Cheng Yen often speaks on different topics related to current events in the world and Tzu Chi volunteers' activities. Some topics include protecting the environment, the need to eradicate our afflictions and materialistic tendencies to cultivate the Dharma, and to have compassion and help others in society. With her sermon programs combined with the rest of Da Ai TV's variety of programming, Cheng Yen creates a mix for Buddhist television with traditional Buddhist sermon preaching and the adaptation of mainstream media formats together on one channel.

Religious lecture

The format of religious lecture or sermon is the main broadcast format for four of the six Buddhist television channels. Since temple sermons are what many monks have trained to do before the advent of television and radio, transitioning a sermon from a temple audience to a mass media audience through the modern technology of radio and television would seem to be the next logical step. Holmes Welch wrote that the modern incarnation of Chinese Buddhist education and lecturing only came about at the beginning of the twentieth century when the Chinese government started confiscating temple property and buildings to

convert them into modern schools. The sangha was criticized for its lack of educational activities and for monks not having a wide understanding of the scriptures. The Buddhist community fought back by creating its own modern Buddhist schools. According to Welch:

> By starting schools of its own, the sangha hoped not only to "get the jump" on the confiscators, but to counter the basis of their criticism. To give monks a modern education and train them how to lecture in public would improve the sangha's public image. Furthermore, it would give the monks a firmer grasp of secular affairs so that they could better defend their property by legal action.[99]

The modern education and practices of monks in contemporary Taiwan, which include building the skills to lecture, have origins in the modernizing movement of early twentieth century China.

While the first modern Buddhist monastic schools were getting started in 1904 to help train lecturers to propagate Buddhism in a modern, secular world, the act of Buddhist lecturing itself stretches back to the pre-modern period when, according to Kenneth Chen citing from the sixth century C.E. *Gaoseng Zhuan* 高僧傳 or *Biography of Eminent Monks*, popular lecturers were spreading the message of the Buddha to the masses with amusing and entertaining stories. According to the *Gaoseng Zhuan*, these propagators needed to have four characteristics in their preaching: a good voice, eloquence, talent, and profundity.[100] Chen gives an example of such a popular lecturer with the translation of the description of a ninth century monk, Wenxu, who was "an outstanding individual, a monk of great virtue, proficient in chanting the sutras, and possessing a soft pleasant voice which moved people. Ignorant men and fascinated women delighted in listening to him; they filled the monasteries

[99] Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 14

[100] Kenneth Ch'en, "The Role of Buddhist Monasteries in T'ang Society," *History of Religions,* Vol. 15, No. 3 (Feb, 1976), 224. See also original text for the *Gaoseng Zhuan* scroll 13. T.50.417c.

whenever he spoke."[101] Mario Poceski also draws from the biographies and evidence of Chan monks up through the tenth century to support the position that lecturing has long been an established tradition for monks in Chinese Buddhism:

> In the process of becoming Dharma teachers (*fashi*), monks trained in the art of delivering public sermons, in addition to mastering the doctrines of canonical texts and related exegetical traditions. Creative textual interpretation and innovative expository style were areas where a charismatic or intellectually gifted monk could leave his personal mark, thereby procuring personal recognition and attracting disciples and patrons.[102]

The words Poceski uses to describe Dharma teachers of pre-modern China can just as equally be used to describe the monks and nuns of Taiwan who speak on television, similarly drawing disciples and patrons with their charisma and eloquence. This type of popular preaching carries on today, not limited to the monastery, but extended to private living rooms throughout Taiwan and potentially the Chinese-speaking world through television. Where the ninth century Wenxu moved people with his voice in the monastery, contemporary monastic preachers like Chin Kung, Hai Tao, and Cheng Yen are moving people with their appeal through their voice projected on television.

Preaching on television does require the consideration of a televised setting. For broadcasting a religious lecture, each monk or nun uses a different setting. Some speakers do so sitting at a desk on which a small statue of a Buddha is placed right in front of the speaker, situated at the bottom center of the screen facing the television viewer. Or there may be a statue of a Buddha on the desk in front of the speaker, but slightly to the side of the

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[101] Ibid., 224.

[102] Mario Poceski, "Chan Rituals of the Abbots' Ascending the Dharma Hall to Preach," in *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice* ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85.

screen. The space behind the speaker may be an empty wall, a Buddhist portrait, or a green screen image of nature, a temple setting, or some other design. Other speakers lecture from a temple hall in which they sit with the temple's main Buddha statue as their background and perhaps have another smaller Buddha statue situated in front of them as well. Another setting used by monks is a classroom setting in which a live audience is listening to the speaker, who has a chalkboard as his background for writing and drawing. In most cases, an image of the Buddha is placed somewhere in the screen together with the monastic speaker, giving the speaker an environment conducive to the propagation of the Buddhist teachings and giving the viewers at home more of a feel that they are at a temple listening to the sermon or that they have brought the temple into their homes – a "television temple" or a "living room Buddha hall."

In many cases, lectures involve going through Buddhist passages and explaining the meaning of the verses using analogies. They also involve storytelling related to personal experiences of the monastic speaker or lay Buddhists or traditional stories from Buddhist sutras. In expounding the particular sutras that have been listed above for the Buddhist channels, the monks that broadcast on television continue a tradition practiced one hundred years before when, at the turn of the century, monks in mainland China had narrowed the range of studying Buddhist texts down to a core set of sutras to which the above sutras belong. One main method of textual study at the beginning of the twentieth century took place in monasteries, where a series of lectures would be carried out by visiting masters, who worked through the sutras line by line.[103] Televised religious lectures today follow this same tradition of being explained line by line and by different monks and nuns who "visit" the

[103] Raoul Birnbaum, "Buddhist China at Century's Turn," *The China Quarterly* No. 174, (June, 2003): 434.

living room Dharma hall when a viewer tunes into a particular Buddhist channel on a given day of the week.

Teaching through Animation

While religious lecture is the main strategy for conveying the Buddhist teachings for four of the six Buddhist stations, another strategy shared by three of the Buddhist channels is the use of animation. Animation brings a moving visual element to the traditional storytelling and teaching that monks do in their sermons. BLTV, Da Ai TV, and Life TV all use forms of animated videos as a means of conveying messages related to Buddhism. Each year, BLTV shows an animated miniseries called "Life of the Buddha" 佛陀的一生 detailing the life of Śākyamuni Buddha up to his final nirvana. A children's cartoon made for BLTV called "Through the Eyes of the Little Monk" 小沙彌歡喜看人間 depicts an animated version of Hsing Yun teaching two young novices various life lessons after they get into mischief in each episode. Both BLTV and Life TV show a children's cartoon called "The Chinese Standards" 中華弟子規 about a boy and a mystical pet dragon, meant to teach children values of respect for one's parents and elders as well as being caring, patient, and diligent. BLTV and Life TV both also show the follow up cartoon series to "The Chinese Standards" called "Chinese Moral Stories" 中華德育故事. Another cartoon shown on BLTV in simple children's animation is "Stories from the Buddhist Scriptures" 佛教經典故事, which is made up of short videos that tell stories of people who harm or kill animals and receive some form of retribution. The stories are meant to teach about the importance of preserving all forms of life.

Life TV has its own collection of short cartoons that tell stories of people harming or killing animals with a message aimed more towards adults, urging viewers not to support the killing of animals for food or clothing. Besides cartoons with simple animation, Life TV also shows beautifully detailed and animated videos, resembling Japanese manga animation, depicting the stories of Mahayana sutras including the *Amitabha Sutra* 佛說阿彌陀經, the *Sutra of Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life* 佛說觀無量壽佛經, and the chapter on the Universal Gate of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara 觀世音菩薩普門品 from the *Lotus Sutra*.

While both BLTV and Life TV work with animation studios in China to produce animation, Da Ai TV creates animated films in its own animation department at their Tzu Chi Culture Center in Taipei. One of their first creations was "The Biography of Venerable Yin Shun" 印順導師傳, who was a proponent of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan and a key figure in Cheng Yen's ordination to become a nun. Da Ai TV animation also created "Venerable Jian Zhen" 鑑真大和尚, which tells the story of the monk Jian Zhen traveling from Tang dynasty China to Japan to teach the Buddhist precepts. Other animated works from Da Ai TV include "Stories Told by Dharma Master Cheng Yen" 證嚴法師說故事, and a children's computer animated cartoon, "The Little Chestnut of the Tang Dynasty" 唐朝小栗子, which teaches children values of respect, caring, and getting along with others.

While animation on television used for Buddhist storytelling is a relatively recent phenomenon, the Buddhist use of images in storytelling stretches back to between the fifth and twelfth centuries CE with the use of illustrated scrolls that were used to tell the stories of *bianwen* 變文, which were popularized story versions of Buddhist sutras. According to Victor Mair, artists could draw or paint the images representing scenes in a *bianwen* on

paper or silk and then the storyteller would use the illustrations as a device during his performance of storytelling.[104] An example of a *bianwen* scroll found in Dunhuang that dates to between the eighth and ninth century CE is the "Transformation Text on the Subjugation of Demons" that tells of the contest of supernatural powers between the monk Śāriputra and the heretical master Raudrāksa. The surviving scroll is 571 cm long and is divided into several distinct frames of pictures that can be used to tell the story as the scroll is rolled along. Wu Hung suggests that two storytellers may have been involved in the performance – a narrator to tell the story in prose and a singer to chant the verses of the story while displaying the images in the picture scroll.[105] Such picture storytelling serves as the precursor for modern forms of animation used for storytelling purposes on Buddhist television in Taiwan. Both serve the purpose of using images to tell a story to an audience. The modern use of cartoons animates those images, bringing a more vivid depiction of the story that was once only seen in still images.

III. Case Study: Da Ai TV and the Adoption of Popular Media

News from a Tzu Chi Buddhist angle

While the Da Ai TV daily news programs have the components of mainstream news programs, such as a weather report, as well as international and local news stories, Da Ai news does not regularly cover stories of homicide, violence, traffic accidents, or popular entertainment as mainstream news does. They instead focus on topics such as Tzu Chi

[104] Victor Mair, *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and Its Indian Genesis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 1.

[105] Wu Hung, "What is Bianxiang? – On the Relationship Between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies,* Vol. 52, No. 1 (Jun., 1992), 157-158.

volunteers acting to help the community and to alleviate the suffering of victims of violence and natural disasters. When they do cover a major story of violence, they do so with a Buddhist viewpoint that differs from traditional mainstream news coverage. An example from 2014 was the incident on May 21 with the first ever attack in Taipei's Metro Rail Transit (MRT) system by a lone knife wielder who killed four subway passengers and injured twenty-four others. On the day of the incident, evening news programs on mainstream channels including CTS, ETTV, and TVBS focused on the crime and the murderer, broadcasting censored images of the murderer walking through the crowded train station after the stabbings and censored still shots of victims lying on the ground captured from people's cell phone cameras. On one evening broadcast for ETTV on the day of the incident, the headline at the top of the screen at the beginning of the broadcast was "The longest 40 seconds, rallying to resist a long knife" with a sub heading at the bottom of the screen of "Frightening moment! Zheng Jie brandishing a knife to slash people on the railway platform. The crowd flees." This was followed by subsequent headings of "Massacre on the railway platform with a swaying knife" and "Massacre on the railway car; death by slashing knife."[106] An early news broadcast on CTS the same day had headings of "Attack by random slashing" and "Three violent slashing deaths on the Metro Rail Transit".[107] Each of these reports focused on the perpetrator and the violence of the crime.

Da Ai TV news covered the topic not by showing footage of the murderer in the subway station or censored images of bloody victims as the mainstream channels had, but by

[106] *Dongsen xinwen* 東森新聞 CH51, "［東森新聞］驚險瞬間！鄭捷月台揮刀砍人、民眾逃,", May 21, 2014, *YouTube.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZg4xX-ed1c. Accessed Aug. 15, 2015.

[107] Ibid.

focusing on how Tzu Chi volunteers were coming to the aid of the injured who were being treated at area hospitals. The title at the beginning of one broadcast was "Northbound MRT injuries, 4 dead; Tzu Chi volunteers show care at hospitals."[108] In the middle of the news segment, as a Tzu Chi volunteer spoke on camera after comforting a family member of the injured, another headline below her read "Families find it difficult to bear, suddenly facing the impermanence of life." So, while the format of the Da Ai news segment looked the same as that of mainstream news with a professional anchor reporting the news from a news studio with headlines on screen, the content moved the focus away from the sensational aspect of the story and towards the example of what Tzu Chi as a quick-acting relief organization can do in times of strife by mobilizing volunteers to assist where needed.[109] The news anchor introduced the news segment saying:

> "There was an incident of random homicide this afternoon at Jiangzicui Station. The casualty report up until now is at twenty-one injured and four unable to be saved. When Tzu Chi volunteers received the information, they went to eight hospitals, including Yadong hospital where they mobilized at once. Twenty-five volunteers proceeded to provide comfort with the hope that the family members could accept the impermanence of life."[110]

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[108] "北捷傷人四死 慈濟志工醫院關懷" Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, May 22, 2014, http://www.daai.tv/daai-web/news/content.php?id=46205. Accessed Aug. 15, 2015.

[109] For a history of Tzu Chi and the organization's relief and charity work, see C. Julia Huang, *Charisma and Compassion: Cheng Yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Movement*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009). Huang gives details of the working structure of the Tzu Chi Foundation and looks at Tzu Chi's charitable activities from the viewpoint of a non-government organization (NGO) as well as from the viewpoint of individual members. See also Mark O'Neill, *Tzu Chi: Serving with Compassion*, (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte. Ltd., 2010). In addition to covering Tzu Chi's work in Taiwan, O'Neill details Tzu Chi relief work in China, Indonesia, South Africa, and the United States.

[110] "北捷傷人四死 慈濟志工醫院關懷, " Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, May 22, 2014, http://www.daai.tv/daai-web/news/content.php?id=46206. Accessed Aug. 15, 2015.

While the beginning of her report sounded similar to reports given on mainstream broadcasts, the second half of the report focusing on Tzu Chi volunteers' actions and the impermanence of life gave television viewers a Tzu Chi Buddhist angle of the event, meant not only to provide information on what had happened, but also to serve as a model of good intention – Tzu Chi volunteers comforting the victims, and Buddhist philosophy – life is impermanent and holding on to things that are impermanent causes suffering. The news story ended with the headline "Providing hot food to warm the heart and stomach; comforting all cases of alarm,"[111] assuring viewers that Tzu Chi volunteers are always there to support those in need, ending the report with a sign of hope. This same strategy is used for international news as well. Each time a natural disaster strikes somewhere in the world, such as the earthquake in Nepal in 2014 or annual typhoon in Taiwan and the Pacific islands, Da Ai news covers those stories from the angle of Tzu Chi volunteers mobilizing to help the suffering victims with food, clothing, shelter, and medical treatment, since it is also Tzu Chi volunteers out in the field who become trained to record and report the stories themselves to be broadcast on Da Ai news.

In addition to the element of sharing news stories of Tzu Chi volunteers, Da Ai news often refers to Cheng Yen who frequently speaks on current events while applying Buddhist teachings and guiding Tzu Chi members. In the midday news hour on May 22, 2014, Da Ai news followed the initial report of the metro rail incident by adding Cheng Yen's response. After the news anchor summarized Cheng Yen's message, the scene cut to Cheng Yen speaking during that morning's Tzu Chi volunteers' assembly in Hualien, highlighting a brief segment of her response, "We still have to find a way to pacify people's hearts, find a

[111] "張羅熱食暖心胃　驚恐情結悉膚慰." Ibid.

way to help people no longer have distress and to extinguish the seeds of fire in people's hearts, everyone's heart, to be able to settle their distress for everyone in all situations with the utmost of each of our abilities. Then, I think that relations between people must be filled with hope."[112] The inclusion of Cheng Yen's responses to news events parallels mainstream news showing the responses of a political leader to a news situation. In this way, Da Ai TV news follows the precedent of mainstream television news by format, but replaces the elements of political authority, such as the president of Taiwan or the mayor of Taipei, with specifically Buddhist authority, Master Cheng Yen as the leader of Tzu Chi. Viewers who may not intentionally watch a religious lecture program, but would tune in to Da Ai TV's news program would then be exposed to short Buddhist messages from the Venerable Cheng Yen as well as to embedded Buddhist messages that are a part of the news reports.

The embedded messages express a Tzu Chi Buddhist point of view in Da Ai news stories in an attempt to influence societal norms and traditions. An example of one long held tradition that Tzu Chi tries to change among Chinese society has been the burning of spirit money on the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month. On those two days each month, numerous residents and business owners throughout Taiwan set up an altar table before the front door of their homes and businesses making offerings of food, incense, and spirit money to the gods and ancestors.[113] Large quantities of joss paper are printed and burned twice monthly every year for this purpose. One of Tzu Chi's ongoing goals is to protect nature and

[112] "北捷事件死傷慘 志工關懷撫不安" Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, May 22, 2014, http://www.daai.tv/daai-web/news/content.php?id=46206. Accessed Aug. 15, 2015.

[113] For a detailed example and analysis of the burning of spirit money in Taiwan on the first and fifteenth of every lunar month, see Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor,* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), 39-50.

the environment by encouraging people to not waste resources, which includes not needlessly burning paper as offerings. To encourage people to stop this practice, Da Ai TV news often broadcasts stories on those days explaining why joss paper should not be burned and showing examples of Taiwanese who have given up the practice. One such report was broadcast on August 16, 2014. The news anchor began by questioning the practice and introducing a woman who had given it up:

> Burning paper money not only pollutes the environment, but in the end, what is it being burned for? There are many people who simply are unable to say the reason. Zhang Gui Xiang was born and grew up in a traditional Taiwanese household. When she was little she watched her elders do the burning. When she grew up, she followed the practice. Early on she knew that burning joss paper did not help the ancestors one bit. Moreover, it was bad for the environment, but she never had the courage to change. In the end, it was her boss's wife who changed her. Zhang Gui Xiang took the money that she was originally going to use for buying joss paper and put it into the bamboo donation container to help towards the welfare of others, using love to eliminate superstition.[114]

After the introduction, the news story showed an interview of Zhang Gui Xiang and her boss's wife, showing them participate in a Tzu Chi meeting and receiving a container to collect money that would help those in need rather than be used towards buying joss paper.

In adding messages on reducing waste and caring for the environment, Tzu Chi adapts the news format to its own goals much like Buddhists of pre-modern eras did with strange tales and morality books. Rather than use the format of news to gain viewers and profit by inserting commercial advertisements for sponsors, Da Ai TV uses the news format to try to influence viewers away from activities that would be harmful to both people and the environment and, instead, influence viewers towards developing compassion to help others as the Tzu Chi volunteers shown in the news do. This adaptation of the news program format

fits with what Heidi Campbell would label as the negotiation process, in which the Tzu Chi Buddhism community conditions news broadcasting to make it acceptable to Buddhist standards by removing the elements of sensationalism and replacing them with stories of compassion.

Adopting the drama format

Another popular television format that Da Ai TV has adopted is the television drama. While mainstream dramas are a mix of fiction and non-fiction, Da Ai TV claims only to create dramas from the true stories of its Tzu Chi volunteers. By doing so, they again take an established television format and adapt it to their Tzu Chi Buddhist purposes. In 2013, dramas accounted for almost 32% of broadcasts on Da Ai TV's standard definition channel. Each one-hour drama series is limited to a specific number of episodes running anywhere from a miniseries of five episodes to a longer series of forty to fifty-five episodes. Each tells the story of a specific person or family facing obstacles in life. "The Journey Toward Blessings" 路長情更長, for example, is a forty-episode series that tells the story of Mei-lan who, as the eldest daughter, struggled to help support her family and care for her siblings while her mother incurred a debt that forced the family to separate. "Garden of Life" 生命花園 is a twenty-episode series that tells the story of Chen Shui-he, who was paralyzed from the waist down after an earthquake and struggled to turn his life around. "Breaking Free" 破浪而出 is a five-episode miniseries that tells the story of Tian-sheng, who went to prison for drugs and gambling and faced several challenges in trying to operate a business after his release.

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[114] "用愛破除迷信 不燒紙錢做公益," Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, Aug. 16, 2014, http://www.daai.tv/daai-web/news/topic.php?id=50093.

Following the same rules for the news as with all of their programs, the dramas do not use violence and provocative scenes as a means of attracting viewers. If someone in the drama smokes, drinks, or gambles, those activities are always shown in a negative light, causing discord within the protagonist's family to show viewers that such habits cause suffering. In the first episode of "Breaking Free," when the protagonist, Tian-sheng, tells the story of his past in a flashback filled with drugs and gambling, it is his family that is shown to suffer when he steals money and makes underhanded deals with seedy characters.

Even in telling the story of a drug addict and delinquent like Tian-sheng, Da Ai TV holds to its policy of not showing direct scenes of violence and negative acts. When Tian-sheng speaks of his early days getting into fights, the fight scene showing a young version of Tian-sheng and his friends striking and kicking others is blocked by obstacles on the ground such as a table or a wall in the alley. The scene shows Tian-sheng's friends committing the act of striking or kicking, but the target of the violent act is hidden by an obstacle so that the television audience does not see the direct act of violence. In scenes involving drugs, Tian-sheng can be seen holding small bags of censored white powder in his room or seen lying on his bed or on the ground suffering the effects of the drugs, but never seen actually ingesting the substance. During scenes with bags of censored white powder in his hand, a small message is displayed at the right of the screen saying, "Value life. Refuse drugs." In this way, the story of Tian-sheng can be told while Da Ai TV holds to its rules for broadcasting.

Each protagonist in a Da Ai TV drama faces a different source of suffering – poverty, debt, a death in the family, a physical disability, difficult family relations, a criminal past, or an extramarital affair, but the one thing that unites the stories is the element of encountering

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Accessed Aug. 15, 2015.

Tzu Chi to help deal with the difficulties. In a 2002 study on Da Ai TV dramas and social marketing, You Li Ping classified Da Ai dramas into three types:

1. "From Suffering to Redemption" – the protagonist, whose life is full of disappointments and frustrations, cannot find a meaning to life until he or she encounters Tzu Chi, after which, his or her life is turned around.

2. "From Success to Failure to Redemption" – The protagonist, who is living well at the beginning of the series, encounters setbacks and misfortune in life, encounters Tzu Chi, and then regains confidence, finding redemption.

3. "Receiving Care and Attention" – From the beginning, the protagonist is a person who Tzu Chi volunteers care for. Because of the care and nurturing from Tzu Chi, the protagonist makes improvements in life and finds real value in humanity.[115]

"Breaking Free" is an example of the first type of drama listed above. In "Breaking Free," after Tian-sheng is arrested on drug charges and sent to prison in the second episode, he first encounters Tzu Chi by way of Tzu Chi's monthly magazine, given to him to read by the prison guard. Reading Cheng Yen's teachings during his time in prison changes his life and his way of thinking, setting the stage for the third episode in which he seeks out Tzu Chi and becomes a volunteer. In the fourth episode of the drama, Tian-sheng, now a full-fledged Tzu Chi volunteer, appears on a Da Ai TV program that highlights Tzu Chi volunteers and their lives. In the drama itself, a mother and son sit and watch Da Ai TV, showing a clip of the real-life Tian-sheng speaking on TV about his fight against drug abuse. The mother takes her son and seeks out Tian-sheng, convinced that he can help her son, who is also suffering from drug abuse problems. The remainder of the series depicts Tian-sheng doing his best to help three young men overcome drug addiction and the perceived stigma from others of being a drug addict through the help of Tzu Chi and through working with Tian-sheng in operating a

vegetarian food establishment. One message of the drama is that Tzu Chi is an organization that can turn peoples' lives around. Tian-sheng serves as an example to viewers that even someone who was once into drugs, gambling, and dishonest behavior can change for the better and dedicate their lives for the sake of helping others, bringing happiness to others as well as oneself.

What this drama shown on a Buddhist television station does not show is an overtly Buddhist message in every episode. As Hai Tao inferred above regarding Da Ai dramas, they are not a replacement for reading or listening to Buddhist teachings. However, small signs of Buddhist practice and faith are presented in the drama in several instances. In one segment, a mother is shown at home praying towards a Buddhist statue for her son to overcome his health problems. In another segment, Tian-sheng is guided through a Tzu Chi center for the first time and sees Tzu Chi members in an assembly chanting a sutra together, following the words of the sutra on the overhead screen. In another instance, Tian-sheng identifies himself as Buddhist to calm a worrying grandmother figure. After a home visitation to a troubled young man, the grandmother cries and runs out to Tian-sheng and his friend, who are just leaving, pleading with them not to leave her grandson and to save him from his drug addiction problem. Tian-sheng holds her hands and replies to her:

> Madam, you don't have to be like this. We absolutely will not give up so easily. We're Buddhists. With all of our heart and all of our power we accept what comes and we'll see whether our predestined affinity (*yuanfen*) with your son is shallow or deep.

His friend A-xiu continues, "Madam, please be reassured. We will definitely use all of our efforts to help him. You don't have to worry." While the small signs of Buddhism in the

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[115] You Li Ping 尤麗萍, "台灣宗教電視台戲劇節目的社會行銷－以慈濟大愛台為例 Drama as a Means of Social Marketing of Religious TV – An Example for Tzu Chi Da Ai TV," (M.A. Thesis, Shih Hsin University, 2002), 85.

dramas are not direct teachings to the audience on Buddhist philosophy, they give the audience a glimpse of Buddhist practice and an indirect introduction to Buddhism and to Tzu Chi. The characters in the dramas speak of Cheng Yen and of the Buddhist teachings that turned their lives around, but Cheng Yen is never shown in the drama and Buddhist teachings are not expounded. The dramas might be said to work as a unit in conjunction with Da Ai TV's other programs. Viewers can be drawn to the dramas for their touching stories and then turn to other programs that feature Cheng Yen and Buddhist teachings out of curiosity to see what exactly changed the lives of the dramas' protagonists.

While Da Ai TV emphasizes the aspect of real and touching stories in their drama series to inspire viewers, the theme of real and touching stories runs throughout all of Da Ai TV's programming – from news segments to dramas to documentaries to two-minute video segments called "*Renjian Pusa* 人間菩薩" or "Human Bodhisattva" that highlight the lives and achievements of Tzu Chi volunteers. Da Ai TV takes whatever format is popular and useful in mainstream media and adapts it to show viewers what Tzu Chi and its volunteers can do in its goal to spread compassion and inspire hope around the world.

What Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi have done with television is a continuation of what Buddhists have done with media since pre-modern times – taking popular media and adapting it to Buddhist purposes. This includes telling stories of exceptional people to inspire audiences with the hope that audiences will use the stories' protagonists as role models and follow the same actions. As seen in the previous chapter, Chinese Buddhist miracle tales written between the fourth and seventh centuries C.E. used stories of exceptional and filial protagonists to demonstrate the power of invoking Buddhist deities and sutras with the aim of having audiences follow the same practices. While most Buddhist television stations follow the tradition of oral story telling by way of preaching monks giving

lectures, Tzu Chi takes the use of television one step further by sharing stories of exceptional people through drama, news, and documentaries in addition to traditional sermons. The story of Tian-sheng above, depicted in a Da Ai drama as well as described by Cheng Yen on her lecture programs, is a contemporary version of the Buddhist strategy to exemplify an exceptional person to influence audiences towards a particular belief or practice. Tzu Chi carries the same hope that creators of pre-modern Buddhist miracle tales had – the hope that audiences will be inspired by the stories told so that they will follow the example and, in Tzu Chi's case, join and become a Tzu Chi volunteer, practicing acts of compassion taught in Buddhism to alleviate the suffering of others. This is done without sacrificing their message as they pay the high cost of operating a television network.

IV. The Cost of Television

What is different with the use of television from traditional print media is the scale of the cost of operation. Where the cost of operating stations that use mainly religious lecture as their primary format may run in the range of 120 million NT per year, as was the case of Life TV above, the total cost for operating Da Ai TV with its variety of different program formats for one year in 2014 was 1,835,771,488 NT (~ $57,100,000 US).[116] Because the cost of operating a television station can be so high, mainstream television broadcasting corporations have traditionally sought and partnered with sponsors to advertise products as a way to pay for operating costs and to earn a profit from the selling of advertising time-slots. Sponsors are willing to pay for advertising time on television if they know that audiences

[116] Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation. "財團法人慈濟傳播人文志業基金會 2014 年 1-12 月支出分析." http://203.69.48.104/culture/tzuchiculture/2014_04.htm. Accessed March 26, 2016.

will watch a television station's programs and therefore also be exposed to the sponsors' television commercial advertisements. Sponsors hope that when viewers see the products being advertised, they will want to go out and buy the products, thereby contributing to the profit of the sponsors. The television station, therefore, has to have programming that will catch the attention of viewers, since viewers are seen as potential consumers of the products that will be advertised. The cost of owning and operating a television station therefore goes beyond monetary costs to include the freedom to decide what to broadcast to attract, keep, and influence a large viewing audience as a way to make profit, keeping audiences and sponsors happy.

In Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's study on the use of mass media as propaganda in the United States during the 1980s, the authors detailed five factors or "filters" that relate the control of resources for mass media broadcasting and the content of what is broadcast:

1. the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms
2. advertising as the primary income source of the mass media
3. the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power
4. "flak" as a means of disciplining the media
5. "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism[117]

The first three factors that determine or prevent a television broadcasting corporation from broadcasting whatever content they choose to all relate to funding and profit – the ability to profit from the project, to pick up advertising sponsors for the project, and to use

[117] Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 2.

information that is approved and funded for the project by sources of power. These sources are usually large corporations with an agenda to influence the buying habits of viewer-consumers. These three factors also apply to television in Taiwan.

How do Buddhist television stations then operate if television is a profit-driven medium controlled by powerful corporate sources of funding that seek to influence viewer-consumers? As seen above, the answer for religious television has been to not show commercials for consumer products and instead to run on member donations. Buddhist channels like Life TV and UCTV run short videos in between their programs seeking viewer donations to support the continued propagation of the Buddha's Dharma on the respective Buddhist television channel, displaying a bank account number and ID name at the end of the video, which viewers can use to donate money. For Buddhists who visit a Life TV Dharma center to participate in weekly prayer activities or make donations, there is a variety of donation boxes labeled for specific donations to different causes, including one for the Life television station. Even Da Ai TV, which has the largest scale of operations among the six Buddhist channels, runs mostly on member donations, which they list on their website, including the sources and the amounts of money that go into Da Ai TV. They also list the amount of expenditures on Da Ai TV projects and divisions as a means of showing accountability for the money that people entrust them with. According to Tzu Chi's listings for 2014, 88% of the income for Da Ai TV came from donations. Another 4% came from sales of goods such as from Tzu Chi sales at their Jing-Si bookstores around Taiwan, while the last 8% came from other sources, which include corporate donations.[118]

[118] Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation. http://www.tzuchiculture.org.tw/tzuchiculture/2014_03.htm. Accessed 8/17/15.

The associate general manager of Da Ai TV, Michael Chang, who came to Da Ai TV with over twenty years of experience working on mainstream television and is a current member of Tzu Chi, gave me his first impressions of Da Ai TV and of Cheng Yen in relation to how the television station runs its finances:

> In the very beginning I was also curious or challenged our Master's real reason to have a TV station. I thought the only reason is she would like to get more members, more followers and she can get more donations, at the very beginning, like 16 years ago, when I first joined here. But later on, I found, no, it's not like the story just like I said. She refused a lot of big amount donations. [Instead,] she would rather influence more viewers. And she always thinks about your motivation if you like to donate money. You won't get a lot of something different just because you are a big donor. She won't give you a privilege or whatever… Everyone will make their donation and one thing, which surprised me the most, is every cent or every dollar NT you donate, they always have a receipt and they always report it to the government. And they always report to the foundation, even one dollar. And they will tell you where the money goes. If you like to make a donation to, for example, charity, they will tell you... Just like if anyone would like to donate to Da Ai TV, they will give you a receipt even if you just donate 10 NT dollars. And we will tell you every dollar in which area they spend the money. For example, to produce this program, for producing that program. And every year, it's all transparent. Not even one dollar will go to the Abode [in Hualien where Master Cheng Yen resides]. They do not use any [of the money] from donations. Do you know that? They always make money to support themselves, for example, [by making] candles and printing [books]… And after sixteen years, I really am touched or moved by that because I think that's not always something they claim they did. Otherwise I [would have thought] about the TV station or media like this: It's only one tool for them to get more followers, more members, so they can get more money.[119]

While Da Ai TV broadcasts programs in formats similar to mainstream television, Michael Chang's response shows that Tzu Chi does not follow the traditional profit-oriented model for television outlined by Herman and Chomsky. Da Ai TV does not work for profit and does not use commercial advertisements. While operating for profit is the norm for television operations, Buddhist organizations have shown that they can run on a separate model of donation-driven funding. For Da Ai TV, that funding comes from viewers called

[119] Interview, July 2, 2013.

Da Ai zhiyou, or Friends of Da Ai, who regularly donate 100 NT (~ $3 US) per month, often from the recycling proceeds that Tzu Chi volunteers collect from Tzu Chi's many recycling centers, all of which is viewable on Tzu Chi's Donation Credit web page. A scan of the donations in 2014 shows that while many single donations were at the level of 100 NT, many donations were also for larger amounts from 1000 NT to 5000 NT (~ $150 US) or more. While there are corporations that wish to make donations as well, Da Ai TV never seeks corporate donations or sponsorship and limits the number of corporate donations every year. In response to my question on seeking donations, Michael Chang replied:

> No, we never ask. Actually, let me give you a funny thing. We only accept, forgive my memory, sixteen or twelve a year – those donors for that kind of thing. Everyone will provide something like six million NT for one year. We don't do the retail, just six million a year. And think of that. If there is something like fifteen companies, then there will be something like ninety million NT… six million for one company. And we only accept fifteen. If you'd really like to do that and there are more than fifteen, then we'll say sorry [to] you, maybe next year. [120]

In gratitude to corporations that do make such donations, Da Ai TV runs short announcements thanking the donors without advertising commercial products. Michael Chang elaborates:

> The difference between Da Ai TV and commercial TV or mainstream TV, first of all, the financial support. We don't depend on commercials at all… not in a commercial way, not like the stereotype of a commercial – we help you to sell something, then you give me some money, no. We don't use that at all. We use public announcements. For example, ASUS computers, notebooks. For example, they donate a certain amount of money to this TV station. And we make a public announcement, maybe [dealing with] environmental protection or the importance [of using] technology to improve our lives, that sort of promotion. We did that for them. And we broadcast [the announcement] a few times a day. But that kind of public announcement and financial support is, I would say, how many, less than 5% for the whole year of revenue of this TV station… Sixteen years ago, the Master insisted that we don't sell commercials. Of course, you can understand the reason why. Once you need the commercial income, you will have to compromise, right? Then how can you

[120] Ibid.

> insist on your ideals or core values, for example, vegetarianism, environmental protection, that sort of thing?[121]

Chang's reasoning for Da Ai TV refusing commercial advertisements touches a key point of Buddhist television broadcasting – the need to control the broadcasting content and therefore the Buddhist message that the broadcasters want to convey. The act of donation in Buddhism also serves as a means of accruing merit and this is something Cheng Yen did not want simply to go to a small group of large donors. Cheng Yen wanted as many people as possible to participate in small donations as a way of accruing merit.

Chang's answer also directly applies to Heidi Campbell's framework for the religious-social shaping of technology, where he questions how core values can be upheld if the technology in question, television, traditionally works as a for-profit medium. Where the Buddhist goal is to spread compassion and to teach about the dangers of desire, greed, and materialism, to suddenly run commercials that advertise consumer products would run counter to the message the Buddhist television stations try to convey. In her daily broadcasts, Cheng Yen at times speaks of materialistic concerns and the need to move past them:

> In our pursuit of comfort and convenience, we've created many impurities in the world. As I often say lately, when we use cell phones, we damage the environment because they contain metals and minerals that need to be mined from the mountain or land. This is how man damages the environment and causes much pollution, disrupting Nature's balance and bringing about many disasters. Nowadays, many people are keen on making money. So, they do whatever they can to make more money. For example, some people keep developing and expanding their businesses, setting up many chain stores, not only in their own countries, but also in many other places around the world. Everyone, we truly must be more farsighted and (give of our love to care for those in need around the world).[122]

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Cheng Yen, "Life Wisdom 人間菩提," Da Ai TV. November 13, 2013.

Cheng Yen's message about caring for others over making money is one that she acts on by refusing to use commercials. Buddhist stations like BTS also refuse to advertise commercial products because such commercials do not conform to the nature and purpose of Buddhist television, which is to work for the public good.[123]

So how do stations like Da Ai TV influence so many people into donating 100 NT per month every month towards Da Ai TV operations? Michael Chang's answer emphasizes openness and wholesomeness, elements that he finds to be different from that of mainstream channels, quoted here at length:

> That will be our challenge. But it's so different. Most of the TV stations in Taiwan, they have never [thought] about that. Even the public TV [station] in Taiwan, they still depend on government subsidies, government budget. That's the reason they have all kinds of problems. They can never function as a real public TV because they need the money from the government. Then how can you claim that you are objective [or that] you are out of the control of the different political parties, that sort of thing? You've got to serve them. So, it's very different. And that's why I said, because we have that challenge. So, we have to insist on the guideline or the things we think we must do. For example, we will say [to] purify people's minds and make the whole society more harmonious and always convince people to help others. We can provide a lot of touching stories, real stories, wholesome programming, that sort of thing. So, we are lucky… because the environment of the medium in Taiwan is really terrible because there are so many TV channels in such a small market. What can they do? They just do something they wouldn't like to do, but they have to do… because it's highly competitive. But here, whenever people would like to know something else other than those political conflicts, those gossips, and all those things, if they'd like to hear or see something else, they'll come to us. And we can, I must say it, we [do] it pretty well. And the main reason is because of two things - because of our Master, not only because of her vision. She has faith on that. In the early days, we always talked to her that, you know, we cannot do it just like this - so clean, because people wouldn't be interested in it. You've got to do something, you know, add a little bit spice of this and a little bit spice of that – chili pepper, you know. Well, she insisted, "I don't need that."
>
> First of all, that makes Da Ai TV quite different from the others, all of, most of the other commercial TV [stations]… And every year, all the money, all the financial support, our financial ability is very wholesome. I can tell you. We always put all the information about our financial situation on the Internet. It's very

[123] Quen Feng, 85.

> transparent. Every year we will do a report and keep it there and it's free for everyone to check…
>
> And the second thing is because we have so many volunteers – Tzu Chi volunteers. They provide us so many touching stories no matter for news or for our drama or for the documentaries or for children's programs. We have so many stories. And of course, another thing we [must not forget] – our audience. There are a lot of people. They accept it! I mean [if] everyone wants those, you know, exciting things. They wouldn't watch, no matter how good you are. Right? So, that's another thing I really admire in the Master's vision because she believes that… I think that kind of thing is totally different between the commercial TV I was working in, because we believed that all the people loved fighting, killing, dirty things, and that sort of thing, so we just put everything in it. That's the main difference between this and that. And I can proudly tell you that the average rating of Da Ai TV for 24 hours is between 15th to 20th among more than 100 channels in Taiwan. That's something I wouldn't believe sixteen or seventeen years ago. And we haven't changed the core values or the way we produce.[124]

Chang emphasizes the ability to maintain Tzu Chi's core values based on Cheng Yen's vision for Buddhist television. Part of the reason he infers that people watch Da Ai TV is that the station is an alternative to mainstream television. For him, Da Ai TV is different from mainstream television because it does not show the same violent content. So, viewers who are tired of seeing stories of murder and violence on mainstream news or in TV dramas and would like something different would then turn to Da Ai TV. He points to the ratings to show that such a formula is successful because people do watch, which surprised him as someone who had been in the media industry with the long-held understanding that sex, violence, and sensationalism attract and sell. Da Ai TV has managed to succeed without the motivation of profit or commercial advertisements and therefore has not needed to compromise their goals for television by adding sensational elements.

One point that Chang brought up more than once was the openness of Da Ai TV's finances. He finds it important that religious television be open with the public about income and what Da Ai TV does with that revenue, being fully aware of financial scandals that have

[124] Interview, July 2, 2013.

taken place with Christian televangelist networks in the United States over the years. This emphasis points to Tzu Chi's status as a non-profit organization being able to operate the mass medium of a television network without running under a traditional profit-oriented model.

The Medium Stays the Same but the Message is Different

While Michael Chang points out how different Da Ai TV is from mainstream networks, the one underlying similarity between programs on Da Ai TV and that of mainstream networks is in the ability to tell compelling stories through established television formats which include drama, news, documentary, and animation. This is what separates Da Ai TV from the other Buddhist stations that focus primarily on religious lecture. As will be seen in the chapter on Buddhist television viewers, stations that focus on religious lecture are apt to attract viewers who are already Buddhist and want to hear a certain monk give Buddhist teachings. While a large number of viewers who watch Da Ai TV may already be members of Tzu Chi, there are also viewers who are not Tzu Chi members, but tune in because they do find the stories of the dramas to be compelling. The initial attraction is in how the Da Ai drama is accepted by the viewer because it is identified, at first, by the same characteristics that dramas on mainstream stations have – protagonists that viewers can identify with and stories of struggling to overcome obstacles or conflict. The difference comes into the story when the element of Tzu Chi is added, affecting the life of the protagonist. This strategy of preserving the format and story elements of television drama while adding Buddhist elements runs parallel to the pre-modern examples found in both the Six Dynasty strange tales and the Ming dynasty morality books in which the popular mass media formats were adopted and Buddhist elements were added in.

The Buddhist adoption of mainstream television program formats in dramas and cartoons is one contemporary example of religious adoption of popular mass media for purposes of introducing the religious organization to outsiders. Elements of mass media technology may have been negotiated and conditioned to suit the religious community, but the actual technology of television broadcasting and the formats of the medium in news, drama, or cartoons are still recognizable enough for audiences outside of the religious community to identify with and tune in to.

The goals for Buddhist use for technology, however, go beyond simply being able to create a television channel operating separately from mainstream television to influence viewers. In the goal to bring a wholesomeness to society, Buddhist channels also want to influence what is broadcast on mainstream channels. In a broadcast of "Life Wisdom" from November 14, 2013, Cheng Yen summed up her goal for the influence of Buddhist television:

> Our Taiwan is like a boat on the sea. How do we steady the boat in the waves? I believe the media has great power to do that. By that, I don't just mean Da Ai TV. I earnestly hope that all those in the media can also realize that speaking kind words and doing good deeds can bring us joy and peace. When everyone is happy and at peace, together we can help to make Taiwan a better place. So, I hope we can share with people (more of the brighter side of humanity). Due to our ignorance, all that is wholesome has been distorted. This is how our ignorance can turn wholesome teachings upside down. So, only when we have correct views, will we realize that we've done wrong and improve… Indeed, to err is human. The key is to reform. To help people reform, we need to find ways... Nowadays, the best way to do that is through technology. By making good use of modern technology, we can share wholesome teachings with people and help them change their wayward ways… But apart from Da Ai TV, we need other TV stations to work together with us to spread love all across Taiwan. Only then can Taiwan enjoy lasting peace and harmony and forever serve as a center of the True Dharma that disseminates wholesome teachings to other parts of the world. I hope we can use technology to spread wholesome teachings instead of using it to bring turmoil and impurities to the world. It all depends on how we make use of it.[125]

[125] Cheng Yen, "Life Wisdom", broadcast on Da Ai TV November 13, 2015.

Rather than simply negotiating usage of an established modern technology for Buddhist usage as would be identified under Campbell's framework for the religious-social shaping of technology, Buddhists like Cheng Yen have a greater goal of having Buddhist technological practices become the model by which mainstream practices should follow. For Cheng Yen, the hope is that mainstream television will show less violence for the sake of drawing in viewers and follow Da Ai TV's model of showing inspirational programs. For Buddhist monks like Hai Tao, it means not only having viewers at home simply sit and watch the television passively, but participate in the rituals and prayers together with the television broadcast. More will be said below on ritual television, but the Buddhist goals for television do change the message that the television medium had originally conveyed from one of influencing consumers to one of spreading compassion.

V. Conclusion

A survey of the six Buddhist television channels in Taiwan has shown that Buddhist strategy for television takes two different paths. The first path taken by four out of six Buddhist stations is to use television as a tool to amplify the reach of traditional Buddhist preaching by monastic lecture. This is the main broadcast strategy for Buddha Compassion TV (BTS), Universal Culture Television (UCTV), Life TV, and Hwazan TV. It is a strategy founded upon a tradition of Buddhist sermonizing in pre-modern China and, more directly, connected to the modernizing movement of Chinese Buddhism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The second path is to follow the model of mainstream television by using a mix of established formats for programs including the use of drama, news, talk shows, cartoons, and documentaries. This second path is the strategy used by Beautiful Life Television (BLTV) and Da Ai TV. It is a strategy that also has precedence in pre-modern

China when popular media in the form of strange tales and morality books were adopted for Buddhist usage. In both cases of religious lecture and adopting popular media formats, Buddhists are following precedents already established by Buddhist practice in pre-modern China.

While the model for mainstream television is to be run by a mass media firm with the goal of profit from selling advertising and from using information and resources provided by government and businesses, Buddhist television shows that operation of a television station does not have to rely on corporate sponsorship or government funding. In an economically stable territory where Buddhism is a major religion and laws governing television allow for the creation of private cable stations, Buddhist television stations can operate from the donations of Buddhist adherents who support the further propagation of the Dharma on television. This donation-driven model is one that Buddhists have long used in their projects from the dynastic period of China to build and rebuild monasteries and print Buddhist books to contemporary donation drives in Taiwan to build Buddhist hospitals, universities, and now television stations. Based on this model of donation-driven operation, Buddhist channels have full control over the content they wish to broadcast without compromising Buddhist values that may conflict with the tradition of advertising consumer products. This freedom of operation not only means the freedom to create and broadcast what they choose, but to hope that other stations will follow suit and broadcast programs not for personal profit under a capitalist model but for the benefit of society and the environment in a Buddhist model of compassion.

The Buddhist adoption of television agrees with the third phase of Heidi Campbell's framework for the religious-social shaping of technology in which the religious community negotiates the usage of the technology and conditions that usage based on the values and

beliefs of the community. In the case of Buddhist television, because commercialism, consumerism, and profit orientation regarding Buddhist images are prohibited according to monastic discipline and go against Buddhist ideas of spreading good messages for the public welfare, those are the aspects of television that the Buddhist communities remove from the operation of television broadcasting, being replaced by donations from community members that are used solely towards Buddhist television's operational costs. In the content that stations broadcast, violence and sensationalism for the sake of attracting viewers are replaced by moral lessons and exemplars to be followed.

For Da Ai TV, specifically, the strategy for using television parallels the pre-modern Buddhist strategies for adopting popular mass media in using an established format of storytelling and adding Buddhist elements to the story while subtracting unwanted elements. Da Ai TV news and dramas subtract elements such as violence and adds in elements of compassion and hope. In this way, Buddhist television offers an alternative for television viewers. At the same time, the Buddhist adoption of television shows that contemporary Chinese Buddhist communities continue to do what Chinese Buddhist communities have done for centuries – adopt whatever tool or popular media are available to spread the Buddhist teachings and influence people towards Buddhist practice.

Chapter Three

Audience Reception: A Taiwanese Buddhist Counter-Public Mediated Space

Besides the study of the production of television, equally important is the study of television's reception by audiences. In reception studies, there is a risk for researchers to generalize from their own interpretations of different media texts, coming to an interpretation that is shared by different groups of audiences. So, careful studies of audience reception and interpretation should be conducted to include surveys, fieldwork, and interviews. In this chapter, I examine the reception of Buddhist television in Taiwan and include these elements of fieldwork, interviews, as well as relevant survey data from previous scholarship done on the reception of Buddhist television in Taiwan. The way in which Taiwanese Buddhists watch Buddhist television has characteristics that resemble Victor Turner's definitions for liminality and *communitas*. In Turner's study of initiation rites of passage, he uses these terms to describe how an individual comes away from the initiation experience with a new view of community and society.[126] This chapter will examine whether Turner's descriptions can be applied to Buddhist television viewers. The way in which viewers watch together and discuss the content afterwards also brings up questions of whether Buddhist television is involved in what Jürgen Habermas has called a "public sphere." Based on his studies of 18th century Europe, Habermas identified a public sphere as a space that emerged in the early modern period when people gathered to voice their opinions to critique and debate governmental policies that affected their lives.[127]

[126] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 96.

[127] Jürgen Habermas, Thomas Burger, and Frederick Lawrence. *The Structural*

However, Habermas also wrote that the invention of the television in the 20th century brought about a decline in critical thought and debate because the medium gave no room for discussion in its consumer-orientated broadcasts of entertainment.[128] Does his description of a decline in critical discussion also apply to Buddhist television? Or does Buddhist television offer an alternative to Habermas's description of a public sphere in dealing with capitalist consumer culture? This chapter addresses the following questions: 1) What kinds of audiences watch Buddhist television and why? 2) How do people watch and what sentiments result from watching? Do they experience a sense of what Victor Turner has called *communitas*? 3) What are the social consequences of watching? Does watching generate any kind of "public sphere" or critical debate as described by Jürgen Habermas? 4) What changes do the media messages undergo from live performance to mediated television broadcast? Does a loss of "aura" matter? And 5) what other benefits are there to watching Buddhist television?

I. Religious Viewing Choices and Why Viewers Watch

One way to answer the questions of who watches Buddhist television and what do viewers get out of watching is through surveys on Buddhist television viewing. Two previous studies on Buddhist television in Taiwan looked at the composition and opinions of specific Buddhist television viewing audiences using the survey questionnaire format. In 2002, Bi Ying 畢盈 conducted a survey, collecting 325 valid questionnaires at predominantly Fo Guang Shan Buddhist centers to statistically examine the Buddhist

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Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 51-52.

[128] Habermas, 163.

television viewing audience and understand correlations between Buddhist television viewing and participation in Buddhist community activities. In 2009, Shi Quen-Feng 釋泉峰 conducted a larger scale survey, collecting 685 valid questionnaires from two separate Buddhist assemblies in the comparison of the Buddha Compassion TV Station (BTS), founded by the Venerable Xintian, with Life TV founded by the Venerable Hai Tao. What both surveys by Bi Ying and Shi Quen-Feng show is the statistics of Buddhist television viewers, including distinctions in age, gender, education, income level, amount of participation in Buddhist activities, Buddhist programs most watched, and motivations for watching Buddhist television. Because this present study does not focus on statistical analysis and instead looks at ethnographic data through interviews and participant observation, referring to the statistical data from the two previous surveys will help to supplement the findings that have been made in the present study. However, results collected from multiple choice questionnaires have a limit to how survey participants can respond as opposed to having an oral interview or open discussion on a particular topic. There is always the possibility that what a participant truly wants to say about a topic in the survey question is not fully represented in the given choices of answers. Perhaps a participant has more to say than simply bubbling in a circle concerning the amount of time spent watching a particular channel. Another deficiency concerning the two previous surveys is their limited scope, being restricted to survey participants at very specific Buddhist locations or events. If resources were available, a more ideal survey would be able to encompass all television viewers in Taiwan in order to get a more accurate picture of how many of Taiwan's viewers tune in to particular Buddhist television stations and why. Such a large-scale survey is outside the boundaries of the present study. However, in my own ethnographic fieldwork I have included the opinions of television viewers who do not identify as Buddhist and do not

regularly attend or participate in Buddhist activities. Through sharing the results of my ethnographic fieldwork together with the data from the previous surveys, this situation of a limited view of Buddhist television reception only through surveys can begin to be remedied as the information gathered from my interviews and participant observations can also serve to expand on the previous studies done on audience reception of Buddhist television in Taiwan.

An initial response to answer the question of who watches Buddhist television is to say that it is Buddhist devotees who are primarily watching to listen to the teachings and stories told by the Buddhist preachers to find answers to problems in their personal lives, as some of the viewer responses in the last chapter demonstrated. There are also viewers of Buddhist television who are not Buddhists. The attraction for many non-Buddhist viewers, however, is not in watching Buddhist sermon programs, but in watching the drama and entertainment programs offered on Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV (Great Love Television) or Fo Guang Shan's BLTV (Beautiful Life Television). While these two groups of television viewers, those seeking spiritual guidance and those seeking entertainment, appear to seek different things, both groups tuning into Buddhist television are receiving the same messages concerning morals and ethics, but through watching different television formats as will be discussed below.

Previous research done on Buddhist Taiwanese television audiences show that people who are watching Buddhist sermon programs are more likely to be Buddhist practitioners, while people who are not devout Buddhists but still watch Buddhist channels are watching Da Ai TV and BLTV for the dramas. Shi Quen Feng's survey on Buddhist television viewing reflects a sample of the viewing population. A total of 685 valid surveys were collected from two separate Buddhist assemblies – the International Ceremony of

Offerings to the Buddha and Sangha and Grand Dharma Assembly in Gratitude to Parents and Prayers of the Humane Kings Sutra for Protection of the Country and Prevention of Calamity (國際供佛齋僧暨孝親報恩仁王護國息災祈福大法會）held at Linkou Stadium in Taipei and the 2007 Central District Grand National Assembly for Offerings to the Buddha and Sangha (2007 度中區全國供佛齋僧大會）held at Changhua County Stadium. The data from the 685 surveys were divided into 556 surveys from participants who self-identified as Buddhists and 129 surveys from respondents who self-identified as members of the general community (一般社群).[129] Part of the survey asked participants to choose which religious channels they watched. The results are listed below in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1 Religious Television Channels in Taiwan and the corresponding number of viewers from the survey conducted in 2007 by Shi Quen Feng

Religious channel watched	Buddhist community members	Percent for Buddhist community	General community members	Percent for general community	Total members	Percent for total
1. Da Ai TV	295	29.9%	72	47.4%	367	32.2%
2.Life TV	160	16.2%	8	5.3%	168	14.8%
3. BTS	148	15.0%	16	10.5%	164	14.4%
4. Hwazan TV	145	14.7%	11	7.2%	156	13.7%
5.BLTV	106	10.8%	21	13.8%	127	11.2%
6. UCTV	97	9.8%	10	6.6%	107	9.4%
7. other	15	1.5%	6	3.9%	21	1.8%
8. no answer	13	1.3%	4	2.6%	17	1.5%
9. Good TV	5	0.5%	4	2.6%	9	0.8%
10. Supreme Master [Chinghai] TV	2	0.2%	0	0%	2	0.2%

In Shi Quen Feng's survey, the top two stations selected by the general community members were Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV and Fo Guang Shan's BLTV, respectively, with Da Ai TV being chosen by almost half of the pool of general community participants. Both Da Ai

[129] Quen Feng, 175.

TV and BLTV are stations that offer a variety of program formats with no emphasis on religious lecture. While the top station chosen by Buddhist community participants was also Da Ai TV, the fraction of total Buddhist participants who chose Da Ai was less than the fraction for the general community participants with only about one third of the Buddhist survey participants choosing Da Ai TV as their most watched Buddhist channel. The next three highest choices for Buddhist participants were stations that offer predominantly religious lecture – Life TV, BTS, and Hwazan TV. There was an almost even distribution in the selection of the religious lecture stations of Hwazan TV, BTS, and Life TV from 14.7% to 15% to 16.2%, respectively. On a separate question asking which type of Buddhist programs the survey participants watch, "Dharma propagation" received the highest percentage by the Buddhist participants (15.9%), followed by "Introduction to Buddhist foundations" (8.2%). For the general audience, the top selection among types of Buddhist programs watched was "drama" (11.7%). "Drama" only received a 5.7% selection by the Buddhist participants.

Shi Quen Feng's data is one form of evidence for the position that it is Buddhist devotees that tend to watch Buddhist lecture programming and are less interested in the drama type programs while general audience members are more attracted to drama as entertainment. This is an important distinction to make as it shows that because there are two different audiences, an audience of devout Buddhist practitioners and general non-religious television audiences, there needs to be at least two different forms of television programs if Buddhist television producers want to attract all viewers towards their Buddhist messages. There are general viewers who simply would not be interested in turning their television on to watch a monk give a lecture. These are the viewers who would rather use television to

watch dramas or other forms of entertainment over watching programs that would be classified as religious lecture.

Nielsen ratings data shared with me by Da Ai TV's assistant general manager, Michael Chang, show evidence that the Buddhist usage of dramas are more widely watched by the general population, while Buddhist sermon programming is watched by a smaller audience, suggesting only devout Buddhist practitioners are watching sermon programs. An example comes from AGB Nielsen data for Da Ai TV on October 15, 2013. The 8:00 PM drama theater shown on Da Ai TV on this night pulled in a ratings share of 2.15. Da Ai TV does not publicly share its ratings because such ratings are used for consumer purposes by television stations, while Da Ai TV is not consumer-oriented. However, if we compare the 2.15 ratings share with the top ratings for the same night for mainstream television channels, we find Da Ai TV's prime time drama ranks in fifth place out of 120 channels as shown in the top ten ratings shares for October 15, 2013 below with Da Ai TV's Drama Theater included[130]:

[130] Daily commercial television ratings accessible from Rainmaker XKM International Corp. http://www1.xkm.com.tw/HTML/tw/hr/DATA/HR131015.htm. Accessed Jan. 1, 2016. Da Ai ratings shared by Da Ai TV through email Feb. 7, 2014. A rating or share of 5.43 means that an estimated 5.43% of the total number of households surveyed by an information and measurement company like the Nielsen Company had televisions tuned into that program at that time.

Table 3.2. Top Ten Highest Ratings Shares for Television Programs for the night of October 15, 2013 from 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM.

Television Program	Program Type	Television Network	Ratings Share
1. "The Feng Shui Family 風水世家"	Drama	Formosa TV (FTV 民視)	5.43
2. "The Heart of Woman 天下女人心"	Drama	Sanli TV (SET 三立台)	3.34
3. "The Eight Immortals Cross the Sea 八仙過海"	Drama	Formosa TV (FTV 民視)	2.32
4. "Chen San and Wu Niang 陳三五娘"	Taiwanese opera	Formosa TV (FTV 民視)	2.26
5. Da Ai Drama Theater	Drama	Da Ai TV (大愛)	2.15
6. "Dramatic Stories of Taiwan 戲說台灣"	Drama	Sanli TV (SET 三立台)	2.1
7. FTV 7:00 Evening News 民七點晚聞	News	Formosa TV (FTV 民視)	2.05
8. CTV World News 中全球新聞	News	China Television (CTV 中視)	1.99
9. CTV Weather Report 中新聞氣象	News	China Television (CTV 中視)	1.99
10. "The Unforgettable Memory 意難忘"	Drama	Formosa TV (FTV 民視)	1.49

As shown in the table above, over half of the top ten programs with the highest ratings shares are dramas. This includes the Da Ai TV drama shown at 8:00 PM. Taiwanese television audiences are more likely to watch dramas as entertainment than any other program format. Da Ai TV has adopted such a format to tap into the viewing interests of the mainstream Taiwanese television viewing audience to spread their Buddhist message of

living and acting with compassion to audiences that would not sit through a religious lecture about compassion.

While the Da Ai Drama Theater usually ranks within the top ten programs in prime time on a regular basis with a rating share of 2.0 on average, the ratings of the sermon programs that precede and follow the Drama Theater are much lower. For the same evening of October 15, 2013, the sermon program preceding the 8:00 PM Drama Theater, "Life Wisdom," received only a 0.12 ratings share on the AGB Nielsen ratings. "All About Health," a fifteen-minute program on health and well-being, followed the Drama Theater with a rating share of 0.54. The religious lecture program, "Wisdom at Dawn," followed this at 9:00 PM and received a rating share of 0.09. The low ratings of the sermon programs, which both precede and follow the high rated drama suggest that while a relatively large share of Taiwan's television viewing audience tunes in to watch the Da Ai Drama Theater, regardless of their religious affiliation, only more devout Tzu Chi members are tuning in or staying to watch Cheng Yen give religious lectures during prime time. General audience members do not show interest in religious lecture on television.

An example of a general audience member who would not be able to sit through a program with an overly religious tone comes through one of the letters written to Da Ai TV printed in the magazine *Da Ai Zhi You* (Friends of Da Ai). The letter writer, Nianqing, writes of his or her interest in Da Ai TV's broadcast of a Buddhist themed Taiwanese opera program:

> I'm not a religious person. I have watched "*Puti Chan Xin* 菩提禪心 (Bodhi Chan Heart)," [a Taiwanese style opera], purely to see Nian Mei. I never thought the Buddha Dharma could go as far as to use Taiwanese opera (*ge zai xi* 歌仔戲) as a technique of expression. I'm very thankful! Speaking frankly, if you want me to sit quietly and listen to Buddhist verses or hymns, that would be very difficult because my heart is frivolous, hot-tempered and I have no patience. However, from learning

> about life through Chinese opera, learning about Buddhism, somehow, I receive an influence and can get the insight of the truth of life.
>
> Suddenly looking back, half of life has already passed. Really, we don't have to brood over the gains and losses that have past. Just try to let go and certainly we will feel much more at ease. I really hope this precious channel can continue to play the program. I believe maybe one day I and many of the fans will become devout Buddhists.
>
> Nianqing[131]

The writer, Nianqing, is someone who would not be attracted to sitting in a temple setting or even sitting at home listening to sermons. However, when Buddhist teachings become embedded in a popular form of entertainment that the viewer has interest in, then there is a chance for the viewer to be introduced to and influenced by Buddhism. The lesson learned by Niangqing through the opera is that there is no need to brood over one's gains and losses and to "just try to let go" to feel more at ease in life. It is a message against the materialistic tendencies of a consumer society that monks and nuns also teach in sermon form. However, Nianqing would not be able to sit through a sermon for lack of patience and so the entertainment format of the message serves the same purpose.

Interviews I conducted with Buddhist devotees support the position that it is devout Buddhists who tune into the religious lecture programs and channels. In asking one Buddhist devotee what the draw of Buddhist sermon programs was over dramas, Mrs. Fanyi Chang, age 47, the owner of a vegetarian establishment who was first introduced in the previous chapter, gave me the following answer for why she only watches Hwazan TV and Life TV, which predominantly broadcast religious lectures:

> I don't watch any other channel because they're a waste of time since they're mostly dramas or stories that are fake. But watching the Buddhist [sermon] channels are a

[131] "*Da Ai Zhi You Jiaoliu Zhan* 大愛之友交流站," *Da Ai Zhi You* 大愛之友 6, No. 90 (2013): 1.

> gateway to wisdom. Whatever problems you have, with the Buddhist teachings, you can solve them well.[132]

For Mrs. Chang, television is not a means of entertainment, but a "gateway to wisdom" as she describes the Buddhist channels that she watches. Since dramas are meant to be a form of storytelling entertainment, Mrs. Chang has no interest in them. She wants only to learn Buddhist teachings done in a direct manner by a Buddhist master rather than through storytelling done with actors. She uses the television not as a means of entertainment, but as a tool for learning lessons about how to solve problems in life.

Another Buddhist practitioner and Buddhist television viewer, Mr. James Hsing, age 41, a Ph.D. candidate studying technology innovation, echoed this sentiment in only watching Life TV for the sermons and nothing else. "I don't watch TV shows or movies at home. Just Buddhism."[133] When asked if he watches any of the other Buddhist channels besides Life TV, he replied, "No, because Life TV has more effect on me. The others, I have no interest in their words, so I don't watch them."[134] The responses from both Mrs. Chang and Mr. Hsing show the devotion that Buddhist practitioners can have towards particular masters on certain Buddhist channels. They are affected by the content and the delivery of the teachings of Hai Tao or Chin Kung and feel an affinity for those speakers. They feel no effect and have no interest in other television programs or program types such as dramas and entertainment programs. Television for these Buddhist practitioners is not a device for entertainment but a tool to hear the Dharma when they selectively tune in only to Life TV or Hwazan TV on a regular basis.

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[132] Interview, August 19, 2013.

[133] Interview, December 21, 2015.

[134] Ibid.

The division between the two different audiences, devout Buddhists who watch sermons and general viewers who watch Buddhist dramas, shows that the strategies of the Buddhist television producers to create programming that attracts a variety of viewers is working. Moreover, this attraction of different audiences by adopting different television programming methods that includes using modern television drama and Taiwanese opera formats resembles the premodern Chinese Buddhist strategies of attracting audiences to Buddhist teachings through the adoption of miracle tales and morality books mentioned in Chapter One. The act of Buddhist television producers catering to the different viewing interests of contemporary television viewers shows that the leaders of the Buddhist institutions in Taiwan with television stations are not doing something revolutionary or anti-Buddhist by creating television dramas or operas, but are following a tradition and a premodern precedent of adopting whatever medium of entertainment is popular to spread the Buddhist teachings. Just as morality books were popular enough in China during the sixteenth century for Buddhist monks like Zhuhong to adopt their format for Buddhist usage, television dramas and operas in the contemporary era are the forms of popular entertainment and modern Buddhist organizations like Tzu Chi are successfully adapting the medium to spread its Buddhist messages.

Comparing Taiwanese Buddhist Viewers and American Christian Viewers

The fact that it is Buddhist practitioners watching Buddhist religious lecture programs resembles the findings done on Christian television in the United States by Stewart Hoover and Peter Horsfield. However, there are differences in why American Christian audiences view Christian programs as opposed to why Taiwanese Buddhist audiences view Buddhist channels. Studies done on Christian television in the United States have shown that

while evangelical Christian television producers have the intention of broadcasting to a non-Christian audience as a way to proselytize, evidence has shown that most viewers who tune in are already Christian and ironically also hold the belief that the programs are intended for a non-Christian audience, but continue to watch because the messages of the programs are in tune with the beliefs of the Christian viewers.[135] An example of this comes from the work of Stewart Hoover. Hoover conducted interviews with viewers of Pat Robertson and the *700 Club,* a long running Christian talk show, coming to the following conclusion concerning the television viewing patterns of the interviewees:

> This means that, for most viewers, not only is Pat Robertson "preaching to the choir" (in that his audience is already basically convinced), but that they are less interested in what he has to say than they are in associating the program with their other beliefs and involvements. Jeff and Joan Wilson, June Mason, and Sally and Jim Horton, for instance, do not now *need* the *700 Club* for themselves. They support it for "those who really need it." Realizing that they, themselves, may actually be the typical or target audience of the program would belie its value for them.
>
> It follows from this, and is apparent from our interviews, that these viewers are active in constructing meanings out of their viewing that transcend those intended by the program's producers. The program is *symbolic* for them. It is not a package of instrumental, powerful messages so much as it is evocative of dimensions of culture, community, and belief based on their "core" beliefs.[136]

Hoover's analysis of viewers transcending the intended message of producers to construct their own meanings falls within the second of the three theoretical positions Stuart Hall held for the encoding and decoding of mass media communication. According to Hall's theoretical second position for communication reception, the code of the producer's message can become negotiated by the viewers, who understand the intended meaning and the purpose of the broadcasted message, but rather than receiving the message as the producers

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[135] See Peter Horsfield, *Religious Television: the American Experience* (New York: Longman, 1984), 133-136.

[136] Stewart Hoover, *Mass Media Religion: The Social Sources of the Electronic Church* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 221-222.

intended, the viewers create their own understanding.[137] For the above viewers of the *700 Club* television program, they are not learning something new by watching Christian television so much as they are adapting the act of watching Christian television to their lives to reinforce their own beliefs concerning religion, the use of religious television, as well as the practices associated with religion such as involvement with their local religious community, all meanings that the television producers did not have as primary goals. Hoover writes that the reasons Christian viewers watch Christian programs like the *700 Club* have more to do with how they see the program as symbolic of their Christian identity and beliefs rather than watching for the content of the messages. An example of this can be seen in the response of Sally Horton, one evangelical television viewer who Hoover spoke with concerning her views on watching the *700 Club,* quoted here at length:

> I think that God has used Christian programming to stir up the religious climate in America. Bringing Steve Bartowski [a former professional football player] right into your living room and telling how Christ is now more important in his life than football, I think that has a subtle effect on local Christians. To hear Julius Erving [a former professional basketball player] say, "I've been born again." He's willing to come out of the closet, and speak boldly, and say, "I'm a Christian." That does have a big impact. It becomes *less objectionable to talk about those things in public*… When I was a little girl growing up, you were really weird if you walked around talking about being saved or born again, or said "Jesus" except as a swear word, or something, you didn't do that. Now, it's quite accepted. It gives me a climate where I can be very bold with my proclamation of the gospel. It's less objectionable to talk about sex, politics. You never used to talk about those things, religion, cults, whatever. There's more openness in society about all sorts of controversial subjects. Certainly, if they can shout "gay freedom" from the housetops, we can shout "Jesus is Lord" from the housetops… We're very proud of Christian programming. We use it ourselves, in our witnessing, we're very proud that instead of just "Bible thumping," as it used to be in the old days on TV—which was mostly embarrassing, really not that great content, it was mostly the salvation message and nothing much more, or something negative, something out of touch with society—now we're not

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[137] See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" in *Media Studies: A Reader*, eds. Sue Thornham, Caroline Bassett, and Paul Marris (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 60.

> ashamed because now there is excellent Christian programming that is very much contemporary, and in touch with society, and not afraid to discuss controversial issues. Hollywood and Madison Avenue will still try to make us look like a bunch of Elmer Gantrys and weirdoes in general, but basically speaking, people think it's OK.[138]

Sally's response shows that she identifies with the *700 Club* because it is a Christian program that matches her contemporary Christian sensibilities in a way that previous evangelical programs did not. Rather than identifying herself as an evangelical Christian in a way that she believed secular mass media had long seen evangelicals, as backwards and uneducated, she could now proudly identify herself as a Christian in connection to programs like the *700 Club*, which displayed professionals and college educated people as proud Christians. In this way, the messages delivered by the preachers were not as important to viewers like Sally as the ability to connect the programming to her personal identity. This contrasts with why Buddhist viewers in Taiwan watch Buddhist television, which directly has to do with listening to the messages of the speaker to apply the messages to viewers' personal lives.

Further evidence for the observation that Buddhist viewers are directly watching for the content of the programs can be found in Bi Ying's 2002 survey on Buddhist television viewing. Bi Ying conducted a survey of eighty multiple choice questions on Buddhist television viewing and collected 325 valid surveys from 206 female participants (63.4%) and 116 male participants (35.7%) from Fo Guang Shan Buddhist centers in Taiwan. The survey contained a section on motivations for watching that allowed participants to agree or disagree with twelve different statements by checking degrees of agreement from "very important" to "not important at all". The survey yielded the following top five motivations

[138] Hoover, 181-182.

for watching Buddhist television. These statements ranked as somewhat or very important for over 60% of the pool of 325 respondents:

(1) "Watching Buddhist channel programs can let me see matters from different points of view." (83.4%)

(2) "Watching Buddhist channel programs can let me better understand Buddhist culture." (80.3%)

(3) "Watching Buddhist channel programs can let me quickly find out information about Buddhist organizations." (68.4%)

(4) "I watch Buddhist channel programs because they are suitable for the whole family to watch." (62.7%)

(5) "Watching Buddhist channel programs can help me forget my worries." [139] (60.9%)

Three of the above selections are statements that align with Buddhist television goals stated in the previous chapter – service to the community by broadcasting public announcements regarding Buddhist activities, helping viewers to alleviate their stress through programming meant to inspire viewers, and producing programs without violence and sensationalism, which fits with the viewers' choosing to watch because the Buddhist channel programs are suitable for the whole family.

Bi Ying's survey also included a separate section of statements for participants to agree or disagree with concerning motivations for media usage related to interactions with society. Several the statements in this section resemble what Stewart Hoover's Christian television viewers might agree with concerning watching because of religious identity.

[139] Bi Ying 畢盈, "台灣地區佛教信眾電視宗教頻道收視行為調查 Audience Analysis of Television Religious Channels: A Study of Taiwanese Buddhists' Behavior" (M.A. Thesis, Nanhua University, 2002), 59-60.

However, the number of survey participants that found these statements to be somewhat important or very important was roughly only half of the total number of participants[140]:

(6) "I watch the Buddhist channel because I support the religious organization" (52.3%)

(7) "I watch the Buddhist channel because I am a member of the Buddhist organization" (39.1%)

(8) "The reason I watch the Buddhist channel is to make good relations with the Buddhist organization" (51.6%)

(9) "Because I participate in Buddhist activities, I want to watch the Buddhist channels" (48.3%)

Statements 6 through 9 above deal with relations of the Buddhist television watcher with the Buddhist organization that produces the television programs. An agreement with each statement may suggest that survey participants see a relation among self-identifying as Buddhist, participating in activities with a given Buddhist organization, and watching the channel or programs of the same Buddhist organization. For statement 7 above, only 39% of the respondents found it somewhat or very important to watch a Buddhist channel because they self-identify as members of the Buddhist organization. The remaining three statements suggest a stronger relation than that of statement 7 between watching Buddhist television and supporting a Buddhist organization to maintain good relations, but the number of survey participants who found such relations important was still only half of the pool of participants rather than a majority. This contrasts with the level of agreement for two other statements within the same set of survey questions concerning reasons for watching.

[140] Ibid., 65.

(10) “Watching Buddhist channel programs gives me the ability to positively face life (76%)

(11) “I watch programs on Buddhist channels with the hope of obtaining a tranquil heart and spirit (心靈的平靜)” (75.7%)

According to the above two statements and survey results, three fourths of the survey participants found it somewhat or very important that watching Buddhist programs could help them positively face life and attain a tranquil heart or peace of mind. The difference in results between statement 10 and 11 and statements 6 through 9 suggest that Buddhist television watchers are watching more for the teachings being broadcast in the hopes of improving the conditions in their lives rather than simply watching because they identify with being Buddhist.

The difference between the American Christian television viewers that Hoover has described as watching as a symbol of identity versus Taiwanese Buddhist television viewers watching directly for the messages suggests that there is a difference in the way these two groups of religious practitioners see themselves in relation to the respective contexts of the environments that they live in. This difference in turn affects how they watch television. From the viewpoint of American evangelicals, like Sally Horton above, being an evangelical in a modern secular American society that has historically looked down on evangelical activities and beliefs in mass media forms as in the 1920s novel *Elmer Gantry* has meant that, for a long time, evangelical Christians have faced an uphill battle for acceptance in society. Through programs like the *700 Club*, which show mainstream media personalities like sports stars identifying as Christian, Christian viewers like Sally Horton are given a more positive feeling for being able to openly self-identify as an evangelical Christian and as a Christian television viewer. The messages preached are not so important to her in that they

are not new to her and they are messages she already believes in. They are messages she believes are meant for non-Christians. For Taiwanese Buddhists who are watching Buddhist programming solely for the teachings, they do not have a problem with identifying as Buddhist since people who identify as Buddhist in Taiwan make up a major section of the population and have not had the problem compared to evangelical Christians of being looked down upon because of Buddhist affiliation. For Taiwanese Buddhist viewers, self-identity is not so much a dilemma as is how to deal with the problems of everyday life. These are problems that the Buddhist television preachers teach how to deal with and these teachings are what Buddhist viewers are paying attention to. The different historical and environmental contexts for the viewers, in addition to the different goals set forth by the religious television producers, has made for a difference in the way American Christians and Taiwanese Buddhists view religious television. For American evangelical Christians, the viewers' goals for television do not directly match up with the goals of the Christian television producers. The viewers' goals for Buddhist television in Taiwan more closely resemble the goals set forth by the Buddhist television producers.

In terms of Stuart Hall's framework for the encoding and decoding of mass media communication, the matching of the Buddhist producers' goals for television with what viewer-practitioners are saying they receive from the broadcasts resembles what Hall calls the dominant-hegemonic position of communication, in which the viewer decodes the message of the broadcast in the terms intended by the television producers. However, in Hall's context, television producers operate under hegemonic interpretations generated by political and military elites. Even what may seem neutral, such as a network news broadcast,

may unconsciously be reproducing hegemonic meanings as defined by political elites.[141] As seen in Chapter Two, in the case of Taiwanese Buddhist television, the monastic producers are consciously speaking against the hegemonic order of capitalistic profit and consumer culture as they emphasize Buddhist teachings against desire. Cheng Yen, for example, has often spoken on the relationship between the pursuit of comfort and convenience in material possessions like cell phones with the destruction of the environment, noting that since peoples' desire to make money can bring harm to others, everyone should be more farsighted and care for those in need. Viewers who regularly watch the sermons on the Buddhist channels, like those of Cheng Yen, are of like mind in seeking an alternative to the culture industry propagated through mainstream television and film, placing them against the powers of mainstream culture and for the ideals set forth by the Buddhist broadcasters. So, for Buddhist television, both the television producer and the viewer are of like mind in understanding that media outside of Buddhist television works on a consumer basis. Both Buddhist producer and audience choose to follow a different path by operating not according to the dominant hegemonic code of the culture industry, but based on a new code that we might identify as an alternative moral-ethical Buddhist code. In this code, the media producer and the audience are of like mind in agreeing with the message that is being propagated concerning how life should be lived according to certain moral and ethical teachings based on religious values and beliefs that are in conflict with what political elites propagate through Hall's definition for the dominant hegemonic code.

[141] Hall, 59-60.

II. Buddhist Television as Liminal Space

The top answer in the above survey in which Buddhist television gives viewers "the ability to see matters from different points of view" fits with Victor Turner's concept of liminality and *communitas*. For Turner, liminal space is found in a rite of passage when the routines and practices of everyday life are suspended and an individual is no longer a part of the hierarchical structure in his or her society. The individual then has the freedom to see and test new possible values and practices in their lives. In Turner's study of community-based initiation rituals, the individual emerges from the liminal state with an awareness that an undifferentiated community, which Turner identifies as "*communitas*," is possible.[142] Individuals then work to change the current secular society, which Turner calls "*societas*," into an environment that more closely resembles the ideal society, which is absent of greed, pride, lust, theft, adultery, and meanness and filled instead with "right relation between people."[143]

The concept of liminality has been applied to Buddhism and to television separately, but not yet to Buddhist television itself. In her study of the charismatic appeal of Tzu Chi's leader Cheng Yen, Julia Huang identifies liminality in the experience Tzu Chi followers in Taiwan gain when Cheng Yen makes her annual trips around Taiwan visiting Tzu Chi branch centers and also when Tzu Chi members make pilgrimages to the Tzu Chi spiritual center in Hualien where they "transform themselves into a new identity within the

[142] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 96.

[143] Turner gives a specific example of these traits in the liminal ritual process for producing a leader of the Ndembu tribe in which the leader must act beyond selfishness, anger, and greed. See Turner, 104.

collectivity, and make sense of miseries through the light of Cheng Yen's teachings."[144] In one example given by Huang, novices and prospective participants in the Tzu Chi youth corps take part in a civility camp in Hualien meant to be a rite of passage towards gaining a Tzu Chi identity. Huang writes that the program "is designed to transform youngsters from sybaritic, self-oriented, and morality-free individuals to ones who are ascetic, mindful, civilized, and disciplined."[145] The Tzu Chi instructors attempt to lead the students away from the lure of such things as pop culture and majoring in business in college and towards an understanding of filial piety and Tzu Chi's mission of compassion for all. After the four day civility camp, the young participants who initially did not have a strong connection to Tzu Chi or Tzu Chi's leader, Cheng Yen, directly make a tearful vow to Cheng Yen in their commencement ceremony with spirited voices: "*Shangren*, we will always follow your footsteps!"[146] The liminal space that Huang identifies in this example of listening to Cheng Yen's teachings through participation in such activities is one of direct face-to-face contact with Cheng Yen and her disciples who serve as instructors. While a transformation of identity and values takes place, it is limited to the participants who can physically travel to Cheng Yen's location. Through television, this space of liminal transformation by listening to the religious leader's teachings is potentially open to more people.

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[144] Julia Huang, *Charisma and Compassion: Cheng Yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 122.

[145] Huang, 109.

[146] Ibid. 114. *Shangren*, which literally means "above human," is the term Tzu Chi members use for Cheng yen. The term started to be used frequently for Cheng Yen by Tzu Chi members some time in the late 1990s. According to Julia Huang, an exact reason for why the term started to be used has not presented itself, but those within the Tzu Chi community consider Cheng Yen to be of a status much higher than themselves, hence above normal humans. See Huang, 34-35.

Stewart Hoover was first to apply Turner's concept of liminality to religious television. Using Turner's concept of liminality, Hoover refers to the work of Bernice Martin, who suggests that liminality is the basis of contemporary leisure activity, including holidays, weekends, theater, and television, which all provide liminal spaces within the routines of everyday life. Hoover then includes Christian television into Martin's proposal:

> All mass media, including the electronic church, are potential sources of liminality. Individual consciousness, based in experience with ever-widening contexts of input and belief, should find within such media symbols and values that are relevant to the search for meaning. Viewers of such programs should find within them "codes" that help focus their efforts toward "revitalization."[147]

One problem with this view of liminality in including all media is that it strays from Turner's idea of *communitas*. Turner writes that "the kind of *communitas* desired by tribesmen in their rites and by hippies in their "happenings" is not the pleasurable and effortless comradeship that can arise between friends, coworkers, or professional colleagues any day. What they seek is a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared."[148] The purpose for people watching television for leisure or "revitalization" is different from the purpose of people wanting a change in their lives through a transformative experience. General television watching and contemporary leisure activities fall more in line with Horkheimer and Adorno's view on film and television as being a part of a culture industry in which people seek entertainment and distraction, only to succumb to the entertainment industry's consumerist mechanisms that keep them repeatedly coming back for more. The stress and anger from the daily work and environmental conditions associated with modern capitalist

[147] Hoover, 103.

[148] Turner, 138.

consumer society is what television viewers are attempting to escape from each evening in their film and television viewing. For Horkheimer and Adorno, spectators at home or in theaters watch Donald Duck receive a comedic beating in his cartoons, "so that the spectators can accustom themselves to theirs."[149] Such leisure activity is not a transformative experience in the way Turner sees liminality and *communitas* to be. There is a potential, as Hoover states, for the electronic church to be a source of liminality if viewers are seeking a transformative experience, but based on his findings, those who are watching Christian television are already convinced through their identities as Christians and are not watching the content of the televised messages to attain a transformation they have already achieved.

Liminality applies more closely to the case for viewers of Buddhist television in Taiwan who are watching to "see matters from different points of view." Mrs. Chang, the owner of the vegetarian establishment, listens to Chin Kung on Hwazan TV and Hai Tao on Life TV with the intention of learning about the meanings found in the Buddhist sutras. She explains, "A lot of these sutras have deep meaning that you don't understand if you read them yourself, but you understand what that is when the masters lecture on them."[150] She continues:

> Watching these kinds of programs have a good effect on people because, for example, if I have a bad temperament, watching them makes my life feel richer, more fulfilled and makes me feel my relations with others run more smoothly. And it makes you really like to help other people. Sometimes people have problems that they have no way to deal with or resolve on their own, but then I can help them. Or if others I know are arguing, I can help them get to the root of it and ask what causes this conflict… The masters speak on just about every topic. After the masters speak on some topic and you experience it for yourself, then you think, "Oh, this is the way

[149] Horkehimer and Adorno, 110.

[150] Interview, August 19, 2013.

> it is". So, everything in the Buddhist teachings covers the things in life. All parts in life are all the same.[151]

Mrs. Chang's description of Buddhist television in helping her relations with others run more smoothly is comparable to Turner's description of tribe-based *communitas* where there is a "right relation between people" in the ideal society. Viewers like Mrs. Chang, come away from the liminal experience of watching monks lecture on television with a new knowledge of how they can fairly deal with situations in their lives. This is like the transformation that individuals experience when they go through the physical liminal experience of rites of passage as described by Turner and by Huang.

Mrs. Chang's feelings on how Buddhist television affects her are not unique. A nurse, Allison Kao, age 37, shared with me similar feelings in her watching of Hwazan TV as well as Life TV:

> It's just sometimes you meet with some situation in life or you're thinking about some problem and wonder why it is that way, and then you turn on and listen and Master Chin Kung will be speaking about that exact situation. And so, that gives you an answer to something in your life.[152]

Mrs. Kao's response resembles that of Mrs. Chang in that she tunes into Buddhist television with a purpose other than simply seeking entertainment or a distraction from the stresses of life. She is instead seeking an answer to how to deal with the stresses or the problems of life. Through the monks' televised sermons, Mrs. Kao finds answers on how to solve her problems rather than watching television as a temporary escape from those problems.

James Hsing watches Hai Tao and various Tibetan rinpoches speak on Life TV regularly every evening at six o'clock, eight o'clock, and eleven o'clock in the evenings. In responding to how watching Buddhist television affects his life, Mr. Hsing replied, "I can

[151] Ibid.

think in a different way when I did some bad things or I meet some obstacles. And I can deal with my friendships better; think about them in different ways to practice compassion."[153] Mr. Hsing's answer coincides with the majority answer chosen by participants in the results to Bi Ying's Buddhist television survey who agreed with the sentence "Watching Buddhist channel programs can let me see matters from different points of view." Mr. Hsing's response also resembles Mrs. Chang's and Mrs. Kao's in each practitioner applying what he or she learns from the sermons to their daily social relationships with friends and family. They are not watching television simply to temporarily escape the daily grind of a stressful working life in society only to repeat the process again as Horkheimer and Adorno describe. By practicing compassion with others, these Buddhist practitioners are bringing about a sense of *communitas* gained from their liminal television watching experience.

What might appear different between this television watching experience and the liminal experience described by Turner and Huang is the frequency of the experience since Turner's description of the liminal experience is a one-time occurrence that is considered life changing, whereas television viewing is something that happens as a regular process. In Turner's definition, the person undergoing the experience physically separates himself from society or goes through a ritual ceremony that is distinct from everyday activities. Television-watching on the other hand would be considered a part of everyday activities. However, what potentially makes the Buddhist sermon-watching experience different from everyday activities is its ability to influence the viewer towards thinking about society differently and interacting with members of society differently just as Turner's liminal

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[152] Interview, June 5, 2014.

[153] Interview, December 21, 2015.

experience does. In addition, the Buddhist television viewer who tunes into a Buddhist sermon is of a mindset that allows for the teachings to influence their lives in a way similar to participants of the one-time liminal event. The accounts above of Mrs. Chang and Mr. Hsing show that the time they have spent in front of the television listening to Buddhist sermon teachings has affected their thoughts and interactions with other people in their lives. However, for these television viewers, the liminal experience is not a one-time experience and it is not the sole life-changing experience in their lives. This is a liminal space that can be recurring one. It might not have the same one-time effect on an individual as leaving the daily routine to participate in a retreat as described in Huang's work, but it does leave an impression that can continually influence the viewer's everyday thoughts and actions. In this way, the Buddhist television viewing experience is a transformative power along gradual lines rather than in one sudden moment.

Tzu Chi Volunteers' Group Viewing as Communitas

Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* in which individuals seek a transformative experience that is communally shared at the root of each person's being can be found in Tzu Chi meeting halls every morning, where Tzu Chi volunteers go through the ritual of morning chanting followed by watching Cheng Yen together in the television program "Wisdom at Dawn 靜思晨語"and discussing her teachings. These morning meetings begin as early as 5:00 AM for some volunteers, who come in first to do morning ritual prayers and sutra chanting together. I first participated in one such assembly in a small meeting room above one of Tzu Chi's Jingsi bookstores in Taipei. There were initially between five and ten volunteers participating in the early morning ritual prayers to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, lasting about one hour. A projector projected the words to a Buddhist sutra onto a large screen at the front of the meeting room. The vertically oriented Chinese characters to the

sutra slowly scrolled across the screen from left to right as the practitioners chanted along together.

After the prayers, the group, which had grown to about fifteen members, watched Cheng Yen speak in the program "Wisdom at Dawn" on the screen of the meeting room generated by the projector. In the program, Cheng Yen spoke on the fires of greed, anger, ignorance, and people being confused by illusions and false appearances. This was followed by Cheng Yen explaining teachings in the *Lotus Sutra*. After the video, one volunteer in the meeting stood up to speak to the group, reflecting on the master's teachings and how everyone could apply those teachings to daily life. "What do we have in our everyday hearts? If just a small part of our hearts is distracted by things around us like appearances, colors, flavors, etc., we must really concentrate our hearts," she said. Other volunteers then took turns doing the same. Another Tzu Chi sister spoke about how we should slowly apply these teachings to our lives. And yet another Tzu Chi sister concurred, saying, "*Shangren's* teaching was very clear. Whatever the situation, we can deal with it. Hopefully we can all watch Da Ai news and hear about the Philippines and concentrate our minds."

At the time, people in the Philippines were suffering from the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan and Tzu Chi was mobilizing relief efforts to help the victims affected by the typhoon. Tzu Chi volunteers, like the ones of the morning meeting I was attending, watched Da Ai news together every morning, to be updated on the situation in the Philippines as they themselves helped collect money for Tzu Chi's relief efforts and prayed daily for the suffering victims of the natural disaster. Through contributing to such relief efforts, their sense of compassion within the notion of *communitas*, stretched farther than their local surrounding community. The Tzu Chi volunteers' actions based on a Tzu Chi group identity and daily discussion and on listening together to the teachings of Cheng Yen

mediated through video resulted in directing their energies towards helping and affecting the lives of people in other communities up to thousands of miles away, surpassing national borders.

This characteristic of surpassing national borders is something Turner has mentioned in his descriptions of *communitas*. Through comparing what Turner has written on *communitas* with characteristics of the Tzu Chi morning meetings, a better understanding can be reached of how these Tzu Chi meetings can be identified as *communitas* and how they differ. One instance where Turner attempts to define *communitas* is in his description of what attributes millenarian movements possess:

> "homogeneity, anonymity, absence of property…, reduction of all to the same status level, the wearing of uniform apparel (sometimes for both sexes), sexual continence…, minimization of sex distinctions…, abolition of rank, humility, disregard for personal appearance, unselfishness, total obedience to the prophet or leader, sacred institution, the maximization of religious as opposed to secular, attitudes and behavior, suspension of kinship rights and obligations (all are siblings or comrades of one another regardless of previous secular ties), simplicity of speech and manners, sacred folly, acceptance of pain and suffering…, and so forth.
>
> It is noteworthy that many of these movements cut right across tribal and national divisions during their initial momentum. *Communitas*, or the "open society," differs in this from structure, or the "closed society," in that it is potentially or ideally extensible to the limits of humanity."[154]

While some of these descriptions of *communitas* do not apply to Tzu Chi meetings or members, such as anonymity and absence of property, many of the terms Turner uses do fit well with how Tzu Chi operates in their gatherings when members listen to Cheng Yen in person or through televisual mediation. Tzu Chi is known for its uniforms that both men and women wear equally regardless of sex or status in society. There are some variations in the standard blue and white uniforms but most everyone in the Tzu Chi morning meetings wears a Tzu Chi uniform when they attend. Hairstyles of Tzu Chi members are conservatively tied

[154] Turner, 111-112.

into a back bun for women and cut short for men as another means to unify personal appearance so that no one lavishly stands out. In these meetings, the members diligently take notes of the leader Cheng Yen's teachings with no one showing any disagreement with the master. Through Cheng Yen's teachings, Tzu Chi members are taught humility and selflessness and are reminded to always be mindful of their thoughts and actions. In this way, there would be a maximization of religious attitude and behavior over secular attitude and behavior. All Tzu Chi members call each other brothers and sisters, using terms such as *shixiong* 師兄 and *shijie* 師姐, respectively. And as mentioned above, the Tzu Chi movement cuts across national borders in its operations to spread compassion through relief efforts to the Philippines as well as around the world. Such efforts spread knowledge of the Tzu Chi movement to other peoples around the world with the ideal that Tzu Chi's influence and teachings will influence all of humanity. Tzu Chi's activities also cut across national borders by way of its morning meetings that take place in several countries outside of the borders of Taiwan as well, which will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

At 7:00 AM, the morning meeting I was attending continued with a live video feed from the Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien, which broadcast the complete daily morning assembly in which Cheng Yen gave her morning speech on Tzu Chi activities around the world. One Tzu Chi brother in his mid-forties who had to leave for work told me that if he misses hearing Cheng Yen speak live in the morning meeting, then he catches up with her teachings on Da Ai TV when they show highlights of the meeting in the evenings when he gets home. "I'll watch Da Ai TV to hear *Shangren's* teachings, but its best to hear the teachings in the morning meeting," he said to me before leaving. One main reason for Tzu Chi members to watch Da Ai TV is to keep up with the teachings of Master Cheng Yen and

to discuss together how to apply those teachings to their lives after watching and taking notes as I witnessed in several morning meetings.

This group discussion gave them a sense of community as everyone participating in the meeting shared the same feelings of reverence for Cheng Yen and feelings of hope for the future through Tzu Chi's activities. There was never any dissent or what would be considered critical debate as described by Jürgen Habermas concerning the salons of 18th century Europe where people gathered and might voice opinions against government policy. For Habermas, what was important in early group formations in European coffee houses and salons was the development of group discussion that started around opinions on literature and moved into debates about politics that were both rational and critical. In this way, Habermas describes the creation of a public sphere that would engage in critical public debate to protect the commercial economy and regulate civil society.[155]

The people who gathered in rooms above and around Tzu Chi bookstores and meeting halls and had decided to become Tzu Chi volunteers, dedicated themselves to the philosophy and goals set forth by Cheng Yen for the Tzu Chi organization, not to protect the commercial economy as a means of private, personal gain but to alleviate people's suffering through spreading Buddhist teachings. Unlike the 18th century European citizens who congregated in salons and became critical of government policies, the volunteers of Tzu Chi believe in Tzu Chi's cause to alleviate the suffering of humanity without criticizing government or government policy or the methods that Tzu Chi employs to meet its goals. In this way, Tzu Chi also creates a public space of meetings of private individuals, but it is a very different public space based on Buddhist principles of quiescence and harmony, and an

[155] Habermas, 51-52.

avoidance of secular materialist political ambitions or political involvement. If a Tzu Chi member wishes to take part in the political world and run for public office, for example, he or she must resign from any Tzu Chi posts held and break off any affiliation with Tzu Chi if they become active in public politics.[156]

Without taking part in political debate on public policy, one of the things in society that Tzu Chi speaks against, as evident in many of Cheng Yen's television lectures, is against desire and greed, which directly or indirectly lead to human suffering in both manmade and natural disasters. It is such things as desire and greed that the members of the morning meetings speak of protecting themselves against to live happy lives. The battle, then, is not against an outside political entity, but an inward struggle with the self against the three poisons of Buddhism – ignorance, attachment, and aversion. This inner struggle of Tzu Chi Buddhists in Taiwan resembles the inner struggle described by Gareth Fisher of contemporary Buddhists in mainland China who choose what he identifies as a synthesis approach to resolving their dilemma of facing a modern economic society that they believe has failed them.[157] In his synthesis approach, related to Chan Buddhist practices, practitioners follow the teachings of Buddhist monks of the temple to synthesize their own solutions and resolve their struggle against societal economic stresses through an inner contemplation, which entails self-reflection. Through following Cheng Yen's teachings, Tzu Chi practitioners also practice self-reflection. And with the belief that our own actions as

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[156] Cheng-Tian Kuo, *Religion and Democracy in Taiwan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 28. For more on Tzu Chi's avoidance of politics, see André Laliberté, *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan: 1989-2003* (New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2004), 86-105.

[157] Gareth Fisher, *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 63, 69-73.

well as our thoughts affect our environment, having compassionate thoughts and acting in positive ways that can help others is how Tzu Chi volunteers operate when they meet regularly to discuss Cheng Yen's teachings and how to implement them. Such behavior resembles the ideal society described by Victor Turner in his definition of *communitas* as described by tribesmen in their rites.

III. Buddhist Television as Counter-Public

The group watching of Cheng Yen's teachings also bears a resemblance to what Charles Hirschkind identifies as a 'counterpublic'. In Hirschkind's study of Egyptian Muslims listening to Islamic sermons on audiocassettes together, he defines a 'counterpublic' as follows:

> In contrast to a space for the formation of political opinion through intersubjective reason, the discursive arena wherein cassette sermons circulate is geared to the deployment of the disciplining power of ethical speech, a goal, however, that takes public deliberation as one of its modalities. Within this context, public speech results not in policy but in pious dispositions, the embodied sensibilities and modes of expression understood to facilitate the development and practice of Islamic virtues, and therefore of Islamic ethical comportment.[158]

Hirschkind's definition explains how Muslims use group cassette listening to create a discursive space for Islamic values in opposition to the public space controlled by the government where Islamic values are suppressed in favor of Western practices of entertainment and consumerism. The complaint some Egyptian Muslims who listen to the cassette sermons have is that Western popular culture works against Islamic values concerning ethics and morals and it is the daily listening of the sermons on cassettes that serve to remind Muslims of ideal behavior. What the Muslim counterpublic shares with the

discursive space in Tzu Chi meetings where Buddhist practitioners listen to Cheng Yen on video screen is the element of finding a space for religious values in which public speech can result in pious dispositions and modes of expressions that can also facilitate the practice of religious virtues and ethical comportment, but of a Buddhist variety. Just as the Muslim cassette listeners that Hirschkind describes listen to the sermon tapes together and discuss how those teachings affect their lives, Tzu Chi members who gather together in their daily morning meetings also discuss how to apply Cheng Yen's teachings to their lives.

However, there are also several differences between the context of Hirschkind's counterpublic and the situation of Tzu Chi discussion groups in Taiwan. One major difference lies in legal access to mass media platforms. In the Egypt of Hirschkind's fieldwork there was a clear ban on Islamic mass media practices that posed a danger to the state because of sermons being critical of the government, resulting in the phenomenon of illegal cassette sermons becoming popular among the masses because they could be quickly copied and distributed and were difficult for the government to ban and control. Television in Egypt is completely under the control of the government and only broadcasts the speeches of government-approved religious speakers. In Taiwan after the removal of martial law, there was a freedom for religious groups to own and operate their own television stations. The content of what is broadcast on those Buddhist stations is not strictly controlled by the Taiwanese government in the way that the Egyptian government controls their television broadcasts. In addition, Buddhist speakers avoid any direct on-air public discussion of politics and so they would pose no immediate danger even if there was tighter censorship concerning political dissent.

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[158] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 106-107.

A Taiwanese Buddhist Lack of Open Criticism

Where in Hirschkind's case, the cassette sermons are democratizing mediums because they allowed for the common man to question the content of the teachings of a sermon outside of the mosque and to debate the meanings of the teachings among his peers, this notion of debate or critique is absent from the group meetings in which Tzu Chi volunteers watched Cheng Yen's program together. The reason for this lies in what Tzu Chi teaches concerning speech. One Tzu Chi volunteer I spoke with, Ms. Janine Kao, age 30, told me in a conversation why Tzu Chi members are not openly critical. According to Ms. Kao, "Tzu Chi teaches us not to do ten bad things – three of body, four of mouth, and three of mind. For the three of body, it is not to kill, steal, or commit adultery. The four of mouth are lying, slander, flattery, and abusive speech (惡口). The three of mind are jealousy, hatred, and ignorance."[159] The teachings Ms. Kao refers to are Buddhist teachings that can be found in texts like the *Sutra of Forty-Two Sections,* dating to between the first and fifth centuries CE in China.[160] Of the four evils of the mouth to avoid, abusive speech is interpreted in the present context to mean avoiding being critical in one's words towards others.

In a discussion I had with the assistant manager of Da Ai TV, Michael Chang, and a Tzu Chi volunteer, Lisa Yu, who works with Mr. Chang, the topic of critical debate came up to which Mr. Chang and Ms. Yu, who are both Tzu Chi Buddhist practitioners, explained the reason there is no critical debate among Tzu Chi members. Mr. Chang initiated the response:

> I think the core value for Buddhism, I'm not sure I am right, is we're looking for happiness… The core value of happiness is [being] harmonious. And how do you get

[159] Interview, May 29, 2016.

[160] The exact dating of the sutra as well as whether the sutra is a translation of a Sanskrit original or a Chinese creation is debated. The sutra consists of 42 short, separate sections that contain mainstream, pre-Mahayana Buddhist teachings.

> harmonious in peace or in mind? You can't read all those [materials on] greed, hatred, and suspicion… That's the reason that I think we develop positive thinking, constructive thinking, according to my understanding. Master [Cheng Yen] always teaches us what you can praise – 'you are good', 'the people around you are good', but don't ever criticize others to say, 'you are wrong'… Sometimes, in order to prove that I'm right, I must say that you are wrong, but according to Master [Cheng Yen] you can insist that you are right, but never say that others are wrong.[161]

At this point, Ms. Yu interjected with the term "slander," which is one of the ten things to avoid, according to Tzu Chi teachings, and Mr. Chang expanded on this:

> Yes, slandering. I think that's the real meaning for our Buddhism. Because you can see it in Burma and some other countries what we are talking about. What kind of Buddhism were we talking about? Those people would go out to the streets and protest. They're monks… It's forbidden in Tzu Chi, no matter how terrible you feel it is. Don't fight for it… According to [Master Cheng Yen] it will only intensify the conflict… You have to get rid of hatred, greed, and attachments… They never encourage us to engage in conflict or critique or be critical.[162]

While the goal is to have harmonious social relations, Mr. Chang did share with me how Tzu Chi members like himself are not always able to follow such teachings and must continue to work towards that ideal. I brought up how even without critical debate, there must be some form of discussion. Mr. Chang replied:

> Discussion, but only on a certain path. I mean they will encourage you to discuss in a constructive way. For example, people like me, I'm the opposite. I'm good at being critical or finding your little problems, but they will always encourage you to look at things by the large picture…They won't forbid you, that sort of thing, but it's not encouraged. But still I'm doing that every day. I'm always criticizing about a lot of things. Although I say that's why I'm not a typical Tzu Chi person.[163]

While the rules against abusive speech and slander are the ideals to follow, Mr. Chang admits that on a daily basis they are not always easy to follow, especially for someone who

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[161] Interview, July 2, 2013.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid.

has worked in the competitive world of commercial television broadcasting for over twenty years before coming to work at Da Ai TV.

Within the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, the Fourth Truth called the Noble Eightfold Path contains the directive to have 'right speech' together with right view, right intention, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. To have right speech means to refrain from false speech, divisive speech, hurtful speech, and idle chatter.[164] The ideal Buddhist who keeps the Eightfold Path in mind would then attempt to refrain from being critical of speakers or leaders or of other people in general since it would be divisive or hurtful speech. Cheng Yen herself elaborates on the notion of right speech in *Still Thoughts*, a compilation of her conversations with people on applying Buddhism to their lives. She relates the element of right speech with speech karma:

> When every word one says is true and one takes responsibility for every word uttered, one has "Right Speech." To do the contrary is to create speech karma. When one opens the mouth and wags the tongue, one always creates karma. Use wisdom to avoid creating bad karma. If one makes jokes or laughs at others, there will be an irrevocable retribution. Harmony and respect are the most important requirements for moral cultivation, thus one's actions should not go against the natural rules of life. Speaking to others with a vulgar tone of voice, lies, profanity, or deception creates karma through sound, which is speech karma.[165]

Both Cheng Yen and Michael Chang bring up the notion of harmony in speaking about words towards others. Critical debate in which one person attacks another person's position would go against this sense of harmony. The question arises then as to how people should express their views if they have a sense of justice and believe their views to be right and the

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[164] For details on the Noble Eightfold Path, see Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 80-84.

[165] Shih Cheng Yen, *Still Thoughts Volume One,* trans. Lin Chia-hui (Taipei: Tzu Chi Cultural Publishing Co., 1996), 140.

view of someone else to be wrong. Cheng Yen answers this by differentiating between a sense of justice and a sense of responsibility:

> A sense of responsibility is a demand on yourself, while a sense of justice is a demand on others. A sense of responsibility is a rational self-reflection, an offering of one's consciousness and talents. A sense of justice is an emotional outpouring, an impulsive response that may result in conflict with others.[166]

In Cheng Yen's answer, there is again the notion that harmony must be maintained and conflict avoided. People should express their disagreement not by being critical of the words and actions of others or putting a "demand on others," but by reflecting on their own actions and making sure they are acting in a way that is rational, morally responsible and in line with the Buddhist teachings. These are the teachings that Tzu Chi volunteers apply to their lives in not being openly critical of others when they speak together in discussion. The discussion is not one identified by the rational, critical, public sphere described by Habermas. Instead, the discussion is a rational and harmonious Buddhist counterpublic space based on Buddhist values that transcend secular materialist ambitions.

This aspect of not being openly critical is shared with other Taiwanese Buddhists as well even if they may have negative opinions on certain religious leaders. In a conversation I had with Ms. Lichen Shen, the meditation practitioner introduced in the previous chapter, I told her I had a meeting with a member of a particular Buddhist group whose leader broadcasts sermons for one hour each night on a non-Buddhist cable channel. The Buddhist organization member that I met with was trying to show me how he could channel the energies of the body based on the leader's teachings to generate heat or energy through his

[166] Ibid., 161.

hand.[167] I named the leader of that religious organization to Ms. Shen and asked if she knew who he was. The wide-eyed expression on her face and the way she said, "Oh, I know him!" suggested to me that she might have a few opinions on the leader of that organization. I asked for details, to which she simply replied, "I won't say." I asked why not and she replied, "I don't want to say anything bad about people. But don't practice strange energies!" Later, I asked if her not wanting to elaborate on that preacher on television had to do with following the Buddhist teachings concerning behavior. She replied, "Yes, that's avoidance of slander (不兩舌)." While she chose not express any opinions on the preacher, Ms. Shen's lack of response implied that she disagreed with what the Buddhist leader of the organization in question was teaching, but she chose not to say anything directly negative about him, since avoiding hurtful or abusive speech is one of the rules she tries to live by. She only warned me not to participate in practices that she felt might be harmful to me. The teaching of having right speech and avoiding the ten evils as interpreted by televised Buddhist preachers and by many Buddhists television viewers in Taiwan urges them not to be openly critical. This is a major difference between the Buddhist television watching audience in Taiwan and the Muslim cassette sermon audience described by Hirschkind.

A lack of critical debate among Buddhist television watchers does not necessarily correlate to blind obedience. Obedience to a leader might fit into a binary scheme of authoritarian power held by one person versus democratic power held by a majority of people concerning political and economic matters. Taiwanese Buddhist television does not fit into the framework of the dominant political and consumer culture that surrounds the

[167] He placed his open palm close to my open palm attempting to generate heat from his palm so that I would feel the heat even though our hands were not physically in contact. I failed to feel any heat, however.

mainstream television channels. As with the teaching of right speech, leaders like Cheng Yen on Da Ai TV and Chin Kung on Hwazan TV broadcast messages on how to alleviate suffering in the world by acting or behaving according to Buddhist principles to handle problems associated with the hegemonic consumer culture, without coming into direct conflict with the problem source. This aspect is similar to what Hirschkind sees in his Egyptian counterpublic. He places his notion of an Egyptian Muslim counterpublic outside of the dominant binaries of contemporary political debate such as liberalism/communalism and democratic/authoritarian to emphasize that the counterpublic is founded on a duty to encourage Muslims to pursue a greater piety in their lives.[168]

A dilemma shared in Hirschkind's work in Egypt, Fisher's work in mainland China, and with the Buddhist television watching community in Taiwan is the problem of confronting a hegemonic economic society that emphasizes capitalistic notions of accumulating wealth and spending of wealth in consumer culture while de-emphasizing the value of religious traditions and teachings that promote moral and ethical behavior. Buddhist devotees who are television watchers like Fanyi Chang and James Hsing are acting against this hegemonic culture in their personal choices of not watching mainstream television and choosing only to watch the programs of Buddhists masters who they feel an affinity with. Their loyalty to a master or Buddhist organization is based on having a shared vision with the master or organization in working towards a harmonious society and environment. This shared vision can result in group formations at regular meetings and assemblies at Buddhist centers like those of Tzu Chi where discussion can take place concerning the application of the Buddhist teachings to people's daily lives without becoming a critique against any individual. For Buddhist television watchers, any disagreement they have with a message on

[168] Hirschkind, 108-109.

television will not result in a critical debate among peers to say who is right and wrong, but possibly a simple pressing of the button on the television remote control to select a preferred channel instead of a channel that has a speaker one does not agree with. A Buddhist devotee may also turn the television off as a means of choosing self-reflection based in a sense of responsibility rather than choosing to critique someone else based on a sense of justice as Cheng Yen differentiates the two concepts above. Against any act of critique in the style of Habermas or Hirschkind's 'counterpublic', this Taiwanese Buddhist decision of choosing harmonious action with those of like-mind and avoiding conflict through a Buddhist sense of responsibility can be considered a part of the alternative Buddhist moral-ethical code that both Buddhist television producer and Buddhist television viewer agree upon. They create a Buddhist religious public sphere that transcends the binaries of the secular public sphere.

Exemplars on Television

In addition to Tzu Chi volunteers watching the Da Ai TV program "Wisdom at Dawn" together, Da Ai TV itself often highlights the lives of Tzu Chi volunteers who participate in the morning meetings and watch Da Ai TV in their daily lives. In a Da Ai TV program called "Tzu Chi This Week" viewers are regularly introduced to Tzu Chi activities worldwide as the program shows individuals and groups who participate in morning study groups that watch Cheng Yen together at various Tzu Chi meeting halls. On the broadcast of May 3, 2014, part of the first half of the program introduced Dr. Xie Mingzhi of the city of Chiayi in Taiwan, showing him participating in a daily early morning Tzu Chi meeting in a meeting hall with approximately 100 Tzu Chi members in attendance, taking notes as he listened to Cheng Yen's talk on "Wisdom at Dawn" on the screen. Because of listening to Cheng Yen's teachings in the morning meetings, Dr. Xie overcame two difficulties in his life

– sleep problems from the stress of his work and problems associated with materialism as a result of his income and status as a doctor. Xie speaks in the program saying:

> After serving in the medical field for years, you find material gains like fame, money and power irresistible. Thus, you will gradually lose yourself in chasing such desires.[169]

The segment ends with the narrator concluding that it is thanks to Master Cheng Yen's Dharma that Dr. Xie is "finding ways to cleanse his heart and return to the correct path." With Dr. Xie's story, not only can viewers see Tzu Chi members participating in morning meetings together, listening to the teachings of Cheng Yen, but they also hear about how participants like Xie Mingzhi have overcome work stress and the attraction of materialism and continue to listen to the teachings of Cheng Yen to stay on a "correct path" to livelihood by overcoming desire – a common theme that the Buddhist channels propagate. Through such programs, Da Ai TV shows the kinds of problems people face in society and shows the solution to those problems by exemplifying the behavior of model Tzu Chi volunteers. Such model behavior is shown in different formats including documentary style news programs like "Tzu Chi This Week," drama formats through the prime-time Da Ai Drama Theater, and sermon format through Cheng Yen's daily talks.

For Tzu Chi viewers of Da Ai TV, the act of watching Cheng Yen on "Wisdom at Dawn" is the liminal space that allows them to see life in a way they had not thought of before and to change their old habits to alleviate their personal suffering. Watching together with others in a group in the Tzu Chi meeting halls and then discussing the meaning of her teachings and how to apply them to daily life creates a community of individuals who share

[169] Xie Mingzhi speaking on "Tzu Chi This Week", broadcast on Da Ai TV on May 3, 2014. Online access at Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視 "[Tzu Chi This Week] 20140503," *YouTube*. May 2, 1014. https://youtu.be/p3y73kHH1Zs. Accessed Jan. 14, 2016.

in the experience of having been positively influenced in their present lives by Tzu Chi and who share in the future goals of influencing others to also alleviate their sufferings caused by greed and desire. The aspect of community in Tzu Chi matches with Turner's concept of *communitas* and is a strong factor in helping each individual feel inspired to go out and help other members of society in the same way that Tzu Chi has helped them, making the Tzu Chi community even larger.

These members of society that gather in Tzu Chi meeting halls to discuss how to implement Buddhist teachings in their lives differ from Habermas's notion of a public sphere that creates critical debate because Tzu Chi members avoid being critical of others. The messages broadcast on Buddhist television that Buddhist viewers listen to emphasize finding harmony in life rather than conflict. Nonetheless, Tzu Chi members actively engage in and react to society, not by criticizing what they disagree with, but by creating a form of Hirschkind's "counterpublic," which advocates alternative values and a life-orientation that is in opposition to consumerism, which is the basis for mainstream television. Life is improved not by criticizing opinions or positions that one disagrees with, but by following the Buddhist teachings that include having right speech, right thought, and right action. These teachings are propagated on Buddhist television to encourage the practice of religious virtues and ethical comportment in daily public life.

IV. What Changes Through Televisual Mediation and Does the Loss of "Aura" Matter?

Buddhist Television as a Substitute for Temple Attendance?

While television allows for people to listen to the Dharma talks of a Buddhist preacher, the question arises as to how the mediated experience changes from the actual

experience of physically attending a temple sermon. Does the mediated experience change the nature of Buddhist worship or ritual and substitute for attendance at actual temple functions? Since mediated ritual will be discussed further in the following chapter, the answer to the question of substitution for temple attendance will be dealt with first. This was first addressed in survey form in 2002 when Bi Ying collected 325 valid surveys from participants of Fo Guang Shan Buddhist centers in Chiayi County. In an initial survey item concerning the relation between Buddhist television and Buddhist center attendance, survey participants were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "Watching Buddhist channels is more convenient than going to Buddhist center activities." Participants were asked to mark statements from "Very important" to "Not important at all." The following shows the results for this statement on convenience[170]:

	Number of participants	percent total
Number of participants who answered	320 out of 325	
"Very important"	86	26.5%
"Somewhat important"	104	32%
"Uncertain"	72	22.2%
"Not that important"	42	12.9%
"Not important at all"	16	4.9%

The results for this initial question show that over half of the survey respondents (58.5% marking either "very important" or "somewhat important") agree with the statement that watching Buddhist television is more convenient than going to a Buddhist center, but

[170] Bi, 65.

the results have no way of indicating whether these same people who agree with the statement actually substitute television for temple attendance because of convenience.

A separate survey statement asked a related question, written in the following way: "Watching Buddhist television can replace personally participating in Buddhist center activities." For this statement, participants were asked to mark choices from "Very satisfied" to "Very Unsatisfied." The following are the results[171]:

	Number of participants	percent total
Number of participants who answered	319 out of 325	
"Very Satisfied"	85	26.2%
"A Little Satisfied"	95	29.2%
"Uncertain"	86	26.5%
"A Little Unsatisfied"	32	9.8%
"Very Unsatisfied"	8	2.5%

The results of this item show that slightly more than half of the survey participants (55.4%) showed some degree of satisfaction in Buddhist television being able to replace actually going to a Buddhist center or temple. In other words, if a participant were going to listen for teachings of the Dharma from a monk or nun at the temple, more than half of the participants are satisfied that staying home and watching a monk or nun give a sermon on television would be able to replace the experience of going to listen at a Buddhist center. However, there is no way to learn from the results who among the survey participants actually had replaced temple attendance with Buddhist television viewing and whether such a substitution was an infrequent and temporary one or a permanent substitution.

[171] Bi, 68.

The responses from some of my interviews shared above suggest that watching Buddhist television can be a substitution for attending a temple sermon on a regular basis as a result of work schedule. Mrs. Fanyi Chang, the vegetarian establishment owner, listens to the Dharma teachers on television because she works every day for most of the day, running her food establishment. During her breaks and at night after work, she tunes in to the Buddhist channels because it is convenient to do so. She does not go to Buddhist temple functions on a regular basis. The same is true for Mrs. Allison Kao, the nurse, who works different shifts at the hospital and finds it convenient to turn on the television after work and watch for a bit as she relaxes at home.

For others, Buddhist television is not a replacement for attending Buddhist center functions, but a complementary activity. Mrs. Wu Xiaowei, age 57, volunteers at one of Life TV's many Buddhist centers in Taipei. She is married and has two adult children, ages 30 and 27 who have already moved out and live on their own. During workdays, she works in a company cafeteria. After work on Tuesday evenings, she volunteers her time at the Life TV Buddhist center, collecting donations from donors towards Life TV's many projects and answering questions that visitors may have concerning the Life TV organization and its activities. While she volunteers at one of the smaller branch centers, every Saturday and Sunday she attends the Buddhist assemblies at the larger meeting centers for prayer and to listen to the monks and nuns lecture on the Dharma. When she goes home in the evenings, she'll watch a variety of programs which include but is not limited to Buddhist programming as she told me. "I watch Buddhist television, but I don't spend all of my time watching Buddhist television. I also like watching the news and Korean dramas. For Buddhist television, I'll watch Master Hai Tao on Life TV and Master Chin Kung giving lectures on

the sutras in the evenings."[172] This is in addition to her waking up every morning and performing the morning Buddhist rituals together with the Buddhist rituals broadcast on Buddhist television starting at 5:00 AM and ending at 6:30 AM. More will be said of Mrs. Wu's participation in television ritual in the following chapter. For now, looking at Mrs. Wu's weekly schedule, one sees that Buddhist television is not a replacement for participating in temple activities at all as she regularly volunteers at a Buddhist center and participates in Buddhist assembly prayers and sermons every weekend.

The same can be said for Ms. Yu Mei Hua, age 48, another volunteer at a Life TV branch center and a Tzu Chi member. Ms. Yu is widowed and lives with her younger sister. She also has a daughter who graduated from Tzu Chi University and works as a nurse in Hualien. Ms. Yu volunteers at the Life TV branch center on Friday evenings. During the day, she goes to work and in the evening, she comes home and watches television for about one or two hours each night. She does not watch any show on a regular basis, but will flip around to different channels – sometimes a Buddhist channel like Da Ai TV, BLTV, or Life TV, and sometimes a mainstream channel to watch news or a drama like on TVBS or a Korean drama. She also watches dramas on Da Ai TV, but she does not watch them on a regular basis since not all dramas on Da Ai TV interest her. When asked why she likes watching Buddhist channels and what kinds of Buddhist programs she watches, she replied, "I can learn about and understand the Buddhist Dharma from watching. My favorite kind of program is watching the monks and nuns lecture on the Dharma."[173] Although she listens to television lectures, this activity does not substitute for actual attendance to Buddhist assemblies. She

[172] Interview, November 27, 2013.

[173] Interview, October 11, 2013.

continues to participate in group sutra recitations and prayers at a Life TV Buddhist center weekly, although not always at the same place as she will visit different centers. At home, on her own, she will recite the *Dizangjing* (*Kṣitigarbha Sutra*). Ms. Yu's combination of volunteering, attending Buddhist assemblies, and watching Buddhist television programs in the evenings shows that Buddhist television is not a complete substitute for all viewers since viewers like Ms. Yu can do both activities in complement of each other.

The way that Ms. Yu watches Buddhist television is also worth noting as it differentiates the mediated experience from the actual experience of attending a temple sermon. According to Ms. Yu, "I watch TV around 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. for one or two hours and I'll usually watch and do some other house chores at the same time… I don't concentrate on the TV because there are other things I need to do, but sometimes if I see a master on who I really like to listen to or I hear a topic that is interesting, then I'll sit down and watch and listen attentively to the master speak."[174] With the television experience, Ms. Yu can flip through channels, watch any channel for a bit and keep flipping. She can conveniently listen to a Dharma talk while she does her housework. If she were attending an actual temple sermon, she would need to sit attentively and respectfully together with the audience before the actual speaker. Even if a live speaker was not present and a video of the speaker was being displayed for the assembly at a Buddhist center, she would still need to sit attentively and respectively together with the audience, listening to the video as a group. In her own home and by herself, there is no need to show attention or respect for anyone's benefit. If she needs to noisily wash the dishes while she listens to the television Dharma, no one would be disturbed as no one is listening to the Dharma besides her. The Dharma teacher would not be

[174] Ibid.

disturbed or annoyed since he is not actually present either, but only exists as a television recording from a previous live event. While different viewers will treat a sermon broadcast differently, Ms. Yu will treat the broadcast just as she does any other television broadcast. The image of the speaker on television is not the same as the actual person. Ms. Yu does not feel that she needs to pay reverence to a television image giving a recorded sermon since the image is not the actual speaker. The recorded television image does not have the aura of the real speaker.

This notion of a speaker's aura not penetrating a technological medium was first brought up by Walter Benjamin, who wrote of the loss of a speaker's aura if mediated through film camera. For Benjamin, an actor loses his aura if he is not performing on stage in front of an audience and is instead performing before a film camera. An actor's cult following is dependent upon the live aura. According to Benjamin:

> [The] film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance, since he does not present his performance to the audience in person. This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the actor. The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera. Consequently, the audience takes the position of the camera; its approach is that of testing. This is not the approach to which cult values may be exposed.[175]

Benjamin's position on the film audience taking on more of a position of a critic than the live audience of the performance resembles Hirschkind's example of Egyptian Islamic cassette sermon audiences in which Hirschkind describes listening to cassette sermons as a democratizing process since the cassette listeners can critique the sermon speaker and debate the content of the sermon since they are not present in front of the live speaker. Presence in front of the live speaker entails respecting the speaker's position on stage in silently listening

[175] Walter Benjamin, 7-8.

to the sermon or to the performance without interruption. There is an aura of the speaker that brings about a quietude in the live audience.

This aura is no longer present if the speaker's presence is mediated through film or television. Benjamin continues:

> This situation might also be characterized as follows: for the first time—and this is the effect of the film—man has to operate with is whole living person, yet forgoing its aura. For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it. The aura which, on the stage, emanates from Macbeth, cannot be separated for the spectators from that of the actor. However, the singularity of the shot in the studio is that the camera is substituted for the public. Consequently, the aura that envelops the actor vanishes, and with it the aura of the figure he portrays. [176]

The aura that Benjamin writes of is what connects the audience and speaker in such a way that the audience has a sense of awe at being in the presence of the speaker, whether as an actor portraying another persona or speaking as himself. The actor's performance on stage is a work of art and it is the changes that take place in the production and reception of art when mediated through mechanical reproduction that Benjamin focuses on. He notes that artworks lost their aura when they moved from their original realm in the services of ritual contexts of the magical and the religious to more recent realms of the political and economic in art's newer role as commodity for consumers. For Benjamin, a similar occurrence took place when the stage actor became a film actor and movie star. "The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity."[177] The actor as a commodity in film is like the replica of a work of art duplicated for sales in that they lose their aura, their uniqueness, and even their original ritual or religious value or purpose. When replicated

[176] Benjamin, 8.

[177] Ibid, 9.

through appearance on film or publication in magazines the work of art's ritual or religious value is replaced with a political value in being able to be openly critiqued and an economic value in being able to be bought and sold. However, for Buddhist television, this loss of aura for the audience does not mean a trade of religious value for political value as seen in the above case in which there is a lack of open criticism among Tzu Chi members who watch Cheng Yen's broadcast together.

Walter Benjamin's position on a loss of aura in mechanical reproduction causing religious or ritual value to be replaced by political value does not hold in the case of Buddhist television. A loss of aura may take place, but political criticism does not ensue. A Buddhist example will serve to support this statement in comparing a case of aura present with a case of aura absent. The first is a case in which an aura can be felt, giving the audience a sense of awe at being in the presence of the speaker, Cheng Yen. The following is a description witnessed by Julia Huang of Cheng Yen visiting a Tzu Chi hospital construction site in 1998 to speak before devotees:

> By 9:00 a.m., when Cheng Yen had completed her tour and reemerged from the hospital building, about fifty men and women of various ages, some in uniforms, had filled the platform in front of the door of the temporary conference room. They were quiet and motionless. As soon as Cheng Yen stepped onto the platform, the crowd immediately flowed toward her, like needles attracted by a magnet. Among them were the Compassion Faith corps members, who at that moment appeared more like part of the crowd than enforcers of order. Those at the front immediately fell on their knees at Cheng Yen's feet with their palms joined, and fixed their gaze firmly on Cheng Yen's face.
>
> Despite the flashing cameras and the intrusion of Cheng Yen's personal film crew's camcorder, the crowd was rather quiet and peaceful—their still postures sharply contrasted with the emotional expressions on their faces…[178]

[178] Huang, 89-90.

Huang's description of the Tzu Chi members standing and kneeling before Cheng Yen suggests a feeling of awe from the audience that resembles what Benjamin describes in terms of a performer having an aura about him when performing in front of a live audience. This awe towards Cheng Yen is something I witnessed for myself at the Still Thoughts Abode in Hualien in 2013 when Tzu Chi members lined up in the lobby of the meeting hall with palms joined, waiting with anticipation for Cheng Yen to enter. As she walked through the lobby with her entourage of nuns, the Tzu Chi volunteers in the lobby stood in several lines quietly to greet her, but the expressions on their faces was like that of fans of Hollywood movie stars watching as a star crosses on the red carpet, giving Cheng Yen's presence before the Tzu Chi volunteers a feeling of what Benjamin calls the cult of the actor because of the aura of the person's presence.

This contrasts with the situation of Tzu Chi volunteers watching Cheng Yen through a video screen at the daily morning meetings of Tzu Chi branch centers. The Tzu Chi volunteers of the morning meetings in Taipei still show their respect for Cheng Yen by standing up from their seats, joining their palms and bowing to the image of Cheng Yen on screen when they see Cheng Yen in Hualien enter the lecture hall during the live video feed. And they remain completely silent and attentive when the image of Cheng Yen delivers her talk. However, there is no urge by the audience to immediately fall to their knees in front of the video of Cheng Yen. The video-watching audience sits on their cushions taking notes of what the image of Cheng Yen teaches, but there is no urge to gather closer to the screen because the screen image is not the actual person. And the expressions on the faces of the morning meeting participants are like those of school students as they take notes on their teacher's words, suggesting they are following a well-worn routine of seeing Cheng Yen on screen every day. In this respect, the aura of the speaker that Benjamin writes of is not

present in this example of video mediation. However, the loss of aura is not accompanied by political critique as the Tzu Chi members show a group respect towards the mechanically reproduced image of Cheng Yen. Moreover, these Tzu Chi volunteers continue to uphold this daily ritual centered on Cheng Yen's video image as a part of their daily practice. Ritual and religious value remains intact in this case of a video image that is purposefully of a religious nature even with a loss of aura of the actual person. No one becomes a critic of the video subject as all members of the group hold the same Buddhist values on refraining from abusive or hurtful speech.

For Buddhists who watch or listen to a monk or nun give a sermon on television, they are not concerned with an aura of the speaker, but are instead listening for the content of the message that they can apply to their lives. Like Ms. Yu above, Mr. He Song Chien, age 52, also turns on the television to listen to Buddhist masters give lectures while Hr. He does work or chores around the house. When he was around age twenty-two, Mr. He started reading books and listening to audiocassettes from Buddhist masters like Chin Kung to try to solve the problem of mental stress and worries. He found the teachings then to be applicable to his life and those teachings helped to change his view on how he lived. When the Buddhist monks started using television as a means of Dharma transmission, he simply added television listening to his routine of reading Buddhist books and listening to Buddhist audiotapes. The aura of the actual presence of the speaker is not necessary because it is the teachings that are important. According to Mr. He, "The teachings I learn from the masters are all teachings that are natural laws and not anything just created by one person. They are teachings about how to perform everyday tasks for daily living in a mindful way."[179] In Mr. He's understanding, the teachings transmitted by the speaker are not the original creation of

the speaker and it is not the speaker or his body that hold importance. The Buddhist teachings that affect his life have been passed down through generations by people who have purportedly come to understand how the laws of nature and the universe work. By listening to such teachings, people can then find how to live in a "mindful way," as he put it, to live a happy and peaceful life. Because of this understanding, for Mr. He, the medium by which the message is delivered, whether through books, audiocassettes, or television are not as important as the content of the message, which is what he is paying attention to.

The effect of television as a tool for Buddhist propagation is then much like a Buddhist book or pamphlet distributed at temples and vegetarian restaurants. A patron to a Buddhist vegetarian restaurant in Taiwan will come in for a meal and may pick up a Buddhist book on the shelf of free Buddhist reading material by the entrance of the restaurant as they leave to return to work or go home just as a television viewer coming home to watch TV and eat dinner may choose to turn the television to a Buddhist channel among all the possible channels while he or she eats or does chores. The teaching within the book or on the television program is a record of the words given by the speaker or writer at another time and space. It is those words that can influence the listener or reader and not the aura of the speaker, who is not actually present in either the television or the book. Buddhist television watching, which acts as a liminal space and time, serves to influence the lives of viewers without the need for the aura of the speaker. And as only someone with a curiosity or direct interest would pick up Buddhist reading material at a vegetarian restaurant, only someone with direct interest, mostly devout Buddhists, would turn to a Buddhist sermon channel, using television as a Dharma teaching tool to listen to Buddhist teachings.

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[179] Interview, September 7, 2013.

Because it is the words and not the aura of the speaker that matter in mass media transmission, television works for Buddhist teachings much like print material, radio, cassette sermons, videotape, CD and DVD media have before Buddhists started using television in Taiwan. It is not a medium meant to replace the actual speaker, but is instead a medium that is an addition to already available technological media. It is the words of the speaker as transmitted through the various mass media forms that can cause an initial interest in the speaker, which may lead the listener or reader to want to find out more about the Buddhist master or the organization afterwards. For Buddhist devotees, it is the added convenience of the medium of television, much like the convenience of reading a Buddhist book or listening to a Buddhist CD at home, that changes how Buddhists are receiving Buddhist teachings. This convenience means that, not only the words, but also the images and voices of Buddhist monastic speakers can be seen and heard within one's very home as a supplement to going to the temple.

For regular Buddhist practitioners, Buddhist television serves as a supplement to temple attendance and not a permanent replacement for temple attendance. The people who are watching television in the convenience of their homes, like Ms. Yu Mei Hua, are doing so as a choice of convenience for what is available while she is at home. As a Buddhist practitioner, she still regularly volunteers at the Life TV branch center and still attends actual Buddhist ceremonies led or sponsored by Master Hai Tao. Buddhist television for her is not a replacement for temple attendance. The same applies to the Tzu Chi volunteers who regularly attend the morning meetings at Tzu Chi centers. They will watch Cheng Yen on "Wisdom at Dawn" at home, if they cannot make it to the Tzu Chi center, but they do their best to continue to attend the morning assemblies to participate in the group discussions.

V. Other Social Effects of Buddhist Television: Alleviating Stress and Anger

In the above examples, a common theme that has presented itself in several answers given in the interviews as well as in the surveys is the theme of alleviating anger and anxiety. In Bi Ying's survey of Buddhist television watchers from Fo Guang Shan, 61% of the survey participants agreed with the statement that watching Buddhist television helped them to forget their worries. An even greater proportion of 76% of the survey participants agreed that watching Buddhist programs helped them to positively face life and hoped they would receive a sense of tranquility or peace of mind from watching. Beyond Bi Ying's survey of limited multiple choice answers, I conducted a smaller scale survey with questions that allowed for free responses as a part of my interviews and received several similar answers concerning the search for alleviating anger and searching for a peaceful mind. When I was given the opportunity at a Bodhi meditation retreat, a Tzu Chi Jingsi bookstore, a repentance ceremony to the 88 Buddhas at a Life TV branch center, and through friendly introductions to unaffiliated Buddhist television watchers, I asked the following two-part question on a paper survey and in person: "Do Buddhist television programs have any influence on your life or habits? What influence do they have?"

Many of the responses I received were a variation of "watching brings tranquility to my heart/mind." The following is a sample of selected written answers from Buddhist television viewers that share a variation of the above answer:

> "My heart will feel tranquil (平靜). I will think things through carefully before acting."
> Mrs. La Shi Mei, age 57

> "They can make my body and mind calm (安定) and my mood peaceful (祥和)."
> Mr. Yin Shao Ning, age 37

"After watching, my mind and thoughts are peaceful (沉靜)
Ms. Liao Zhi Tian, age 55

"They make my frame of mind tranquil (平靜) and happy."
Mr. Wang Zhi Qing, age 46

"They make my frame of mind calm (安定)
Ms. Chao Tang Yu, age 56

"My heart is tranquil (平靜) after I watch."
Mr. Ye Li, age 42

"Watching more Da Ai TV programs can make my mind tranquil."
Mrs. Qi Shi Yi, age 60

"They calm my mind down."
Mr. Ai Zhi Hui, age 37

"They bring calm, making it difficult to get angry, so that I can show tolerance and forgive other people."
Ms. Liu Chia-Lin, age 45

"After watching, my heart is more tranquil and I can cultivate and maintain a heart of compassion."
Mrs. Yun Fa, age 37

"I watch because Master Hai Tao and Master Chin Kung teach us how to get rid of anger. We learn about how to deal with our troubles."
Ms. Yan Ming Hui, age 56

"If I have worries, [the programs] can calm my heart (靜心) and purify me. The contents relate to the heart. They can change my thoughts to be more positive, and change my state of mind to be less negative."
Ms. Zhang Yu Yin, age 61

"They make my heart tranquil and stable. The Dharma cuts through ignorance and worries, and gets rid of bad habits, so that I can learn the Buddhist teachings of compassion and wisdom. And they make my family more harmonious, peaceful, and auspicious.
Ms. Chin Wei Li, age 58

Each of the answers above shares a variation of expressing how Buddhist television programs can bring about a sense of tranquility to the viewer; a sense of tranquility through

listening to the Buddhist teachings that counters the stresses of working life. While entertainment programs on mainstream channels can also be considered stress relievers, what those programs do not do is teach viewers how to be less angry or be filled with less anxiety on a daily basis when confronted with the stress of living and working in a modern capitalistic and competitive economic society. They only relieve the present anxiety and prepare the viewer to return to work only to take on new anxiety again. One Da Ai TV viewer who I was introduced to, Mr. Lin Yuan Tai, age 48, expressed this idea to me in his home regarding being able to face daily problems:

> From my experience, [the Da Ai TV programs] show that when I meet up with difficult situations, I can consciously deal with them. That is to say, I'm not afraid of difficulties. Because they teach you that in your life, it is in your heart, when you meet with difficulties, you can resolve them. You can face them and deal with them and then let them go… For example, you went to work in the morning and came home from work, and you feel anxiety because of something. When you watch the program, it will make your heart more stable – peaceful in your heart. And you can have the energy to go to work the next day. So, in my everyday life, it's not very stressful.[180]

Mr. Lin has no affiliation with Tzu Chi, which runs Da Ai TV. He simply started watching Da Ai TV one day about twelve years ago when he was flipping through channels. Since then, all he watches on television is Da Ai TV in the evenings after he comes home from work. His answer concerning being able to face one's difficulties in one's heart to resolve those difficulties resembles Cheng Yen's teaching on choosing a method of self-reflection in dealing with one's problems instead of critiquing someone or something else that might otherwise be considered the source of the problem or stress. Such Buddhist teachings of mindfulness and self-reflection are not usually offered in mainstream television programs.

[180] Interview, June 2, 2014.

Teachings on mindfulness and calming one's heart to deal with stress are also not teachings that are taught in secular education as another Buddhist television viewer, Mr. Liu Ying Guo, age 55, expressed to me:

> [Buddhist television] can change people's hearts. Regular education doesn't do that. Regular education only teaches you to make money, get a career, etc. Buddhism is not a religion, but a way of life – a way to change your life. For example, why get angry? Buddhism teaches that there is no reason to get angry. It's a waste of energy. Buddhism comes in many forms to teach people of different levels and abilities.[181]

Based on Mr. Liu's view, there is a clear distinction between what is taught in regular education and secular life and what is taught in Buddhism. In the former, students are taught, as Mr. Liu says, to make money and get a career. The goal in life in that respect is to accumulate as much wealth and material gains as possible because material gains lead to happiness. However, what comes together with the career and the working life to accumulate material gains is the stress associated with the daily work – stress from competing with others to get a better position or a raise in salary, or stress from trying to meet a quota for the company to profit. Associated with that stress is the anger felt when one's goals are not met or some obstacle stands in the way of that job promotion or that raise or meeting the quota. In contrast to that stress and anger associated with trying to accumulate material wealth and status are the Buddhist teachings, which are of the position that there is no reason to get angry, based on how Mr. Liu sees the teachings through his Buddhist television viewing and participation in Buddhist functions. I happened to meet Mr. Liu at a Buddhist event sponsored by Life TV for the releasing of life back into the wild. We both participated in the ritual prayers led by Hai Tao himself and in the releasing of fish back into the ocean in the afternoon. For Mr. Liu, who only watches Buddhist programs on television in the evenings and nothing else, the television is a Buddhist tool that propagates the Dharma in many

different forms – religious lectures for devout practitioners like himself and other formats such as dramas, cartoons, and children's programs for a variety of audiences with different tastes.

Even though Buddhist television can mimic the operation and appearance of mainstream channels, the goal of the Buddhist television producers to change the hearts of people so that they are mindful in their everyday lives and can calmly deal with life's obstacles without stress, anxiety, and anger are clearly different from the goals for monetary profit of the producers of mainstream television channels. And viewers like Mr. Liu watch Buddhist television to be reminded of being mindful in life every day.

While Buddhist teachings on dealing with stress and anger associated with working life in industrial capitalistic society may be a modern phenomenon, there have been lessons on dealing with anger in Buddhism in many of the earliest Buddhist teachings. The *Dhammapada*, which is part of the Khuddaka Nikaya of the Pali Canon, contains a chapter called "Anger" with teachings specifically dealing with anger as demonstrated in the first three verses of the chapter:

> 221. One should give up anger, renounce pride, and overcome all fetters. Suffering never befalls him who clings not to mind and body and is detached.
>
> 222. One who checks rising anger as a charioteer checks a rolling chariot, him I call a true charioteer; others only hold the reins.
>
> 223. Overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; overcome the liar by truth.[182]

The preface of the earliest Chinese edition of the *Dhammapada* called the *Fa ju jing* 法句經, attributed to Zhi Qian 支謙 (fl. 222-252 CE), dates the first translation of the *Dhammapada*

[181] Interview, October 26, 2013.

into Chinese to 224 CE with the original source material likely coming from the Pali Canon, according to Itsu Maki.[183] Dealing with anger was a part of the earliest of Buddhist transmissions to China.

While there is little or no evidence to show how these teachings on anger were received or put into practice by early Chinese Buddhists, lessons on anger have continued to appear in Chinese Buddhist history. The Chan master Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720-814 CE) spoke on anger on at least two occasions as recorded in his sayings and teachings found in the eleventh century CE *Transmission of the Lamp* 景德傳燈錄. When asked about the Dharma gate of Mahayana Sudden Enlightenment, he is attributed as saying, "Completely stop all involving causes: greed, anger, lust, attachment. Feelings of purity or impurity should be extinguished. As for the five desires and the eight lusts, one need not be bound by seeing, hearing, perceiving or knowing; or be deluded under any circumstance."[184] In another section from *The Sayings of Baizhang,* anger is expressed in a simile. "Anger is like a rock, love is like river water. Right now, just have no anger, no love; this is passing through mountains, rivers, and stone walls."[185] For Baizhang, all emotions that relate to attachments

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[182] Buddharakkhita Thera, trans., *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1996), 76.

[183] Itsu Maki, "On the Chinese Dhammapada with Special Reference to the Preface Attached Thereto," *The Annals of the Hitotsubashi Academy,* vol. 9, no. 1, 1958, p. 116-117. See also Charles Willemen, "The Prefaces to the Chinese Dharmapadas Fa-chü Ching and Ch'u-yao Ching," *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, Vol. 59, Livr. 1/5 (1973), pp. 204-205, who also writes that the source material for the *Fa ju jing* was from the Pali Canon.

[184] Translation from Gary Synder, *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes & Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1969), 74. See also T. 51.249b.

[185] Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker, ed. *The Roaring Stream: A New Zen Reader* (Hopewell: The Ecco Press, 1996), 63.

of the material world, including anger, and all desires of the material world must be surpassed for one to realize enlightenment. We even see an instance of a proscription against anger in Zhuhong's sixteenth century morality book, the *Record of Self-Knowledge* 自知錄, which penalizes the reader with demerits if he gets angry at his parents:

> 3. For each time one becomes angry when scolded by one's parents, count one demerit.
> 4. When one talks back to one's parents, count ten demerits.[186]

While the emphasis in Zhuhong's examples concerning anger is on the importance of filial piety, it is still a lesson in which the reader is meant to learn self-control over his temper on a daily basis. This self-control or self-awareness of anger as taught in the *Dhammapada* and the teachings of Baizhang and Zhuhong are still practiced today in a different form through the teachings of the monks and nuns in Taiwan as evident in the Buddhist viewer responses above.

V. Conclusion

Victor Turner's original notion of a liminal space was limited to a single event in a person's lifetime when he or she has a transformative experience that affects how life, society, and community are viewed and how the person undergoing the liminal experience interacts with community and society thereafter. I believe along the lines of Bernice Martin and Stewart Hoover that a liminal space can potentially take place more than once in people's lives, even in regularly recurring times, under the condition that these people are consciously seeking out a time and space outside of their routines of work and normal thought to open their minds to new ideas to engage in a *communitas* in which all members of

the community work for the betterment of their environment and society. Devout Buddhist viewers of Buddhist television fit these conditions in that they are consciously seeking out teachings outside of their everyday knowledge to find ways of coping with the difficulties of living in a materialistic consumer-driven society.

When such viewers assemble to watch Buddhist television programs together as the members of Tzu Chi do in their daily and weekly meetings, they create a Buddhist counterpublic mediated space which allows for the discussion of how to live moral and ethical lives following Buddhist teachings. These gatherings of private people creating public spaces are different from the public spheres of rational and critical debates described by Jürgen Habermas in that there are no critical debates taking place to further a political or economic agenda motivated by self-profit. Tzu Chi members consider their group actions to be rational and harmonious in that they work together to further their goals for helping society within and beyond national boundaries without being directly critical of government. These Buddhist counterpublic spaces resemble the Egyptian Muslim counterpublic spaces described by Charles Hirschkind in that they are spaces in which the religious community can urge each other to uphold their religious values and practices against a secular society. The Buddhist mediated spaces differ from Muslim mediated spaces because they do not serve as a platform for community members to critique the speakers mediated through audio or visual mechanisms.

Walter Benjamin's position is similar to Hirschkind's in considering the mediated speaker to be open to criticism by an audience that is not directly face to face with the speaker or the speaker's aura. This does not hold true for Taiwanese Buddhist audiences

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[186] Chün-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 243.

since they uphold the Buddhist teaching that people should refrain from abusive speech, which would include open criticism. In the case of Buddhist television, a lack of aura of the live speaker does not lead to political critique or commodification as a work of art might as described by Benjamin. Unlike a work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, a Buddhist television program maintains a specifically religious and ritual function and rather than lose value as it gets replicated, Buddhist teachings serve their purpose even more through replication as more people encounter the teachings in a more convenient way and can access those teachings in their new current forms of televised sermon or drama or even Taiwanese opera. Rather than seeing Buddhist television as a possible substitution for visiting an actual Buddhist temple or center, Buddhist television is an addition to the different mediums of Buddhist teachings already in existence – print material, radio, CDs, and DVDs, which have long served as supplements or compliments to Buddhist preachers and institutions rather than as complete replacements. As long as Taiwanese Buddhists uphold the Buddhist values against lying, slander, flattery, and abusive speech, they will continue to have a counterpublic mediated sphere that is absent of open criticism of others and emphasizes harmony in working together to help society. It takes both the work of the Buddhist television producers and the reception practices of the Buddhist practitioners being of like mind to create a counterpublic Buddhist mediated sphere outside of the binary secular public sphere. Whether such a condition using television and modern media sources will continue into the future will depend upon whether Buddhist leaders of the future follow the precedent set by the current popular Buddhist preachers and on whether Taiwanese Buddhist practitioners will continue to uphold the importance of Buddhist values that emphasize living in harmony with society rather than creating conflict.

Chapter Four

Television as Ritual Implement

On an episode of the Da Ai TV program, "People" (*Da Ai Renwu Zhi* 大愛人物誌), viewers are introduced to Mr. Wu Shui Mu, a Tzu Chi volunteer.[187] The video of Mr. Wu begins by showing him light incense in his home before an altar to Guanyin in Mr. Wu's living room. The combination altar and bookshelf takes up the wall space of the living room directly opposite the entrance to his home. The large picture of Guanyin sits at the center of the altar and bookshelf. Directly below the altar to Guanyin is the television set, turned on to Da Ai TV, broadcasting the morning ritual that runs from 4:30 AM to 5:30 AM every morning. Mr. Wu places the incense in the incense burner as the nuns of Tzu Chi chant the morning ritual in the television broadcast. The scene of the program then jumps forward in time to right after the morning ritual, showing Mr. Wu and his wife watching Master Cheng Yen give a daily Buddhist sermon on the program "Wisdom at Dawn" (*Jing Si Chen Yu* 靜思晨語). The program narrator says that Mr. Wu watches "Wisdom at Dawn" every morning as the video segment shows him sitting attentively in the center of his living room on a small stool with hands placed palms up over his laps and fingers of the right hand placed gently over the left hand as if in a meditative posture. This is Mr. Wu's daily morning ritual routine centered around both Tzu Chi Buddhist practice and around the television. On another Da Ai Program, "Tzu Chi in Malaysia" (*Dama Ci Qing Jing* 大馬慈濟情), viewers are introduced

[187] Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視, "*Da Ai Renwu Zhi* 大愛人物誌." *YouTube*. July, 1, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idZC5yjBuO8. Accessed May 15, 2017.

to Tzu Chi volunteer, Mr. Li Xian Xiong and his wife, Mrs. Chen Yu Bao.[188] In one scene, the broadcast shows Mrs. Chen in their living room sitting on a chair, facing the television with her hands together at her chest in prayer. She is watching Da Ai TV during the broadcast of the daily five-minute prayer song. She prays along with the broadcast, "In my heart, I feel deep gratefulness in still thoughts…"

Both of the examples above show Buddhist practitioners using television as the central implement in ritual and prayer. Buddhist television in Taiwan is not merely a way to transmit messages in sermon and entertainment formats to receptive viewers, but it is also a way to guide practitioners in acts of Buddhist practice. The event of the ritual is something that takes place on television through both recorded and live broadcasts. This is something Jacques Derrida was perhaps not aware of when he spoke of the mediatization of religion being fundamentally Christian as opposed to non-Christian because of the religious event showing itself in the form of Christian mass on television.[189] Another point that Derrida makes on religious television is that its production and organization is always a national phenomenon tied to national language and the nation-state.[190] Can this statement be equally applied to Taiwanese Buddhist television? And if audiences are watching this Buddhist television and performing these rituals at the same time, can we apply what Benedict Anderson applied to the concept of nations with his notion of an 'imagined community' for Buddhist television watchers if they identify themselves as members of a larger community

[188] Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視, "*Dama Ci Qing Jing* 大馬慈濟情." *YouTube*, Sep. 21, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hkv0AB90aik. Accessed May 15, 2017.

[189] Jacques Derrida, "Above All, No Journalists!" in Hendt de Vries and Samuel Weber, eds. *Religion and Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 58.

[190] Ibid., 61-62.

of Buddhist practitioners? When Marshal McLuhan wrote that the medium is the message concerning television, he did not consider the impact of religious content on television and how television would change or add to habits of ritual practice, creating a sacred space around the technological medium. Charles Hirschkind implied a sacred space being created when Egyptian Muslims listened to sermons on cassette tape in public. Purnima Mankekar described a sacred space when Indian television viewers purified themselves before watching the *Ramayana* dramatized on a television serial broadcast on Indian national television. Do Taiwanese viewers of Buddhist ritual programming create a sacred space in their television-assisted practice? This chapter addresses the above questions to explore Taiwanese Buddhist television's role in religious mediatization of the ritual event.

I. The Event of Buddhist Ritual and the Imagined Community

Morning and Evening Prayers

On Taiwanese Buddhist television, ritual takes two different forms – a regularly repeated broadcast of morning and evening prayers and live broadcasts of special religious assemblies. Through these broadcasts, "the event" that is the practice of religion is actually shown on television and not simply talked about or described or discussed as Derrida comments on concerning his view of Buddhist television and other non-Christian programming in France. In his essay, "Above All, No Journalists!" Derrida writes:

> In France, there are now also Buddhist programs. However, the non-Christian programs consist in filming a speech, pedagogy, or discussions, but never events. During a Christian mass, by contrast, the thing itself, the event takes place in front of the camera: communion, the coming of real presence, the Eucharist in a certain sense, even the miracle (miracles are produced on American television)—the thing actually takes place "live" *as* a religious event, *as* a sacred event. In other religions religion is *spoken about*, but the sacred event itself does not take place in the very flesh of those who present themselves before the camera." [191]

[191] Derrida, 58.

Buddhist programming in France may not yet show the ritual event that Derrida describes, but looking back to the above two examples for Taiwan, viewer-practitioners who tune in to Buddhist channels are doing more than passively watching the television program or listening to a speaker. They are actively performing the ritual together with the broadcast. By doing so, these viewers create a use for television not originally envisioned by television's creators. With televised ritual, Buddhist producers and practitioners transform the television from being a tool for unidirectional communication and commercial entertainment into a tool for ritual practice. This takes both forms of live broadcast for a united and simultaneous ritual performance across vast geographies as well as a recorded broadcast as an aid for individual prayers done at home.

All six Buddhist channels broadcast morning and/or evening rituals on a set schedule. Buddha Compassion TV (BTS) broadcasts a recorded video of a morning service performed at Jinglu Temple 淨律寺 every day from 4:00 AM to 5:00 AM. The daily morning recitation is composed of venerating several Buddhas and bodhisattvas, invoking the name of Amitabha Buddha, and reciting several sutras and gathas. The broadcast shows the monks performing the morning ritual within the Buddha hall as the words to the service are displayed at the bottom of the screen for viewers at home to follow along. Both Life TV and UCTV follow the same format for their morning rituals containing similar morning service content, broadcasting a recording of the morning service from one of their affiliated temples. The broadcast times are slightly different with Life TV's broadcast at 5:00 to 6:00 AM and that of UCTV from 5:30 to 6:20 AM. However, the evening service for these three Buddhist channels broadcast at the same time at 4:00 to 5:00 PM. The evening service for the three broadcasts also contain similar elements such as reciting the *Amitabha Sutra*, the *Heart*

Sutra, repeated invocation of Amitabha Buddha, and reciting several mantras such as the Great Compassion Mantra 大悲咒.

Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV broadcasts *Fa Hua Jing Xu* 法華經序 every morning from 4:30 to 5:30 AM, a morning ritual recorded at the Jingsi Abode in Hualien that venerates the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. The original broadcast showed only nuns performing the ritual in the main hall. This changed by 2016 when a new video of the morning ritual was created, showing the ritual performed by a larger group of nuns in addition to lay Tzu Chi volunteers, both male and female, participating in the ritual, standing outside of the hall in the central courtyard. Beyond this service, Da Ai TV also broadcasts a short prayer song three times a day at 7:30 AM, 1:30 PM, and 5:30 PM as a way for viewers to join in praying for the world to be filled with peace, harmony, wisdom and love with no suffering or hate.

BLTV does a half hour broadcast of *Fan Yin Qing Liu* 梵音清流 as a morning service at 6:00 AM and as the evening service at 4:00 PM. BLTV's *Fan Yin Qing Liu* is a collection of recordings by the monks and nuns of Fo Guan Shan reciting over twenty different Buddhist sutras and mantras that are chanted during the morning and evening ritual. This collection has also been recorded onto seven DVD disks that can be purchased on BLTV's website. Each day on BLTV for the morning and evening rituals, a different half hour segment of chanting from the collection is broadcast. This differs from the above Buddhist channels, which broadcast the performance each day of a single ritual performed in a Buddha hall. During the broadcast of the chanting on BLTV, different Buddhist images are interspersed with images of monastic assemblies chanting. While the ritual broadcasts of Life TV and Buddha Compassion TV also intersperse images of Buddhas, bodhisattvas,

nature, and other images with the video of the monks and nuns chanting in the hall, the visual broadcast of BLTV is completely made of images serving as the visual supplement for the vocal chanting. The summary of the collection given on the BLTV website, from which visitors can purchase their own DVD set, describes the *Fan Yin Qing Liu* as an accompaniment tool to be used when one wakes in the morning and does the morning service to have an auspicious, tranquil, and joyous energy to face the challenges of life and to be used at the end of every day for evening service when one unloads the day's troubles to cleanse the body and purify the spirit.[192]

Imagined Community at a Set Time

What BLTV describes for the *Fan Yin Qing Liu* as an accompaniment tool can be applied to all of the morning and evening broadcasts of the ritual services. They are accompaniment tools meant to aid Buddhist devotees at home in performing the daily ritual services. What has not been emphasized with these daily broadcasts is that they are allowing devotees of these Buddhist communities to perform their daily rituals at the exact same time and at the exact same pace as everyone else who is using the broadcasts. Congregants of a particular temple who chant together can clearly be seen united in their chanting activities and can be considered a community. Devotees who use television for their daily chanting and are chanting at the same time as others watching the same broadcast can be considered an imagined Buddhist community.

On a daily basis, these viewer-practitioners are not united in morning prayer location, but are united in the exact time they begin their prayers and the pace at which they chant, based on following the television broadcast. This somewhat resembles what Walter

[192] Beautiful Life Television. 人間電視股份有限公司. http://www.bltv.tv/shop/?s=00000008. Accessed August 30, 2014.

Armbrust has described in the Egyptian Muslim televised call to prayer. According to Walter Armbrust's work in 1990 on Egyptian television, "the *adhan* (call to prayer) came in the middle of films, dramatic serials, news broadcasts, and advertising intervals. Whatever happened to be on was interrupted at the correct time for the *adhan*."[193] In Armbrust's study, television marked time at specific intervals for Muslim viewers to begin their daily prayer rituals. While Buddhist ritual television in Taiwan shares this function of marking time for daily rituals, what differs from Egyptian Muslim call to prayer is the broadcast of the actual full hour-long Buddhist morning and evening services guided by the chanting of the Buddhist monks. Anyone chanting at those times would be chanting in unison. The following two Life TV volunteers are an example of this unified prayer.

Mrs. Wu Xiaowei, age 57, the cafeteria worker and Life TV volunteer introduced in the last chapter, is someone who regularly uses the television broadcasts in her morning service at home. Every morning, she wakes up early and does her morning prayers and chanting with the television on. From 5:00 AM to 6:00 AM she has the television tuned in to Life TV, doing the morning prayers together with the broadcast. Then from 6:00 AM to 6:30 AM, she tunes the television to BLTV and chants along with the Fo Guang Shan morning chanting broadcast. When asked how she positions herself during these morning prayers with the television on, she replied, "I turn on the TV and listen to the chanting in the background as I face the Buddhist altar and chant with the pace of the broadcast."[194] So for Mrs. Wu, the visuals shown on television are not so important, since she faces her own

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[193] Walter Armbrust, "Synchronizing Watches: The State, the Consumer, and Sacred Time in Ramadan Television," in Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, ed. *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 214.

[194] Interview, November 27, 2013.

Buddhist altar. What is more important is the broadcasted chanting that sets the pace for her own chanting and prayers. And unlike attending a single temple congregation, Mrs. Wu actually creates her own morning repertoire when she participates in the two separate morning services by first using Life TV's morning ritual broadcast, followed by BLTV's half hour broadcast.

Mrs. Chen Mei Li, age 58, is married with one son who has already graduated college. She and her husband wake up early every morning to do the morning recitation as well as the evening recitation. She turns on her television to Life TV and recites along with the television broadcast. I asked her if she looked at the television screen during her chanting. She answered, "Since I do it every day, I don't need to look at the TV with its subtitles. I just face the Buddhist altar."[195] She has been married for thirty-one years and has done the daily morning and evening rituals daily since getting married. Besides following the rituals, she also watches Life TV every day to listen to the various Buddhist masters preach.

Both Mrs. Wu and Mrs. Chen use Life TV's television broadcast of the morning chanting service as an aid in their own morning rituals at home. For both Mrs. Wu and Mrs. Chen, what is important in the broadcast is not so much the visuals on the screen as being able to chant together at the same pace with the voices of the monks in the recording. The television broadcast marks the time for their daily prayers as well as guides them in the pace of their chanting, beginning and ending at the same time every day. Mrs. Wu and Mrs. Chen are both a part of what we might consider to be an imagined community of Buddhist practitioners in that they are using the same technological medium at the same time of day to

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[195] Interview, October 11, 2013.

do the same activity that other Buddhist practitioners may be doing in their own homes as well.

The idea of an imagined community was first considered by Benedict Anderson, who applied it to the concept of nationalism. He proposed that nationalism came about in connection to the decline of two older cultural systems that he identified as the religious community and the dynastic realm. The pre-modern global religious communities were imagined communities linked by sacred languages such as Arabic for the Muslim community and Latin for the Christian community. According to Anderson, part of the reason for the decline of these religious communities was the demotion of the sacred language itself with the increased usage and teaching through vernacular languages. When the modern imagined community of nationalism came to the fore, it expressed itself partially through the usage of the modern medium of the newspaper, replacing the sacred rituals of religion. However, what Anderson writes of the newspaper, interestingly, can be reconfigured to reapply to the present-day religious community in relation to Taiwanese Buddhist television. Concerning newspapers and how newspaper readers can imagine they are a part of a larger nation of similar members, Anderson writes:

> We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that… The significance of this mass ceremony - Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers - is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?[196]

[196] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 35-36.

Anderson ends the paragraph noting that community in anonymity is the hallmark of modern nations. In the above description, the act of reading newspapers in the morning and evening have taken over the time of prayer in an imagined community of national citizens that is secular and historically clocked by the date on the newspaper, which marks the march of time that will never repeat itself and is always progressing forward.

However, the Taiwanese Buddhists adoption of modern media brings a return to an imagined religious community with an emphasis on sharing the usage of the television for ritual. In this returning imagined religious community the secular newspaper that replaced morning prayers has itself been replaced by the television that is used specifically as a tool to guide viewers in morning and evening prayers. And where the newspaper marked time in a forward progression that is characteristic of nationalist tendencies, ritual television returns to a concept of circular time because at the exact same time every day at 6:00 AM and 4:00 PM the exact same ritual will be broadcast for Buddhist practitioners to perform their own daily chants and prayers at home. Unlike the secular newspaper which contains news stories each day of nations in conflict as a way to profit from a readership that sees themselves as one nation competing against other nations, the Buddhist ritual programs offer praises and devotion to the many Buddhas and bodhisattvas with prayers of compassion towards all beings regardless of imagined national identity. However, the limit to access of understanding these ritual broadcasts, as with being a member of the religious community in the pre-modern frame of imagined communities, still centers on language.

The condition of participation in this "return of the religious" as Jacques Derrida calls it is that one must be able to understand and use spoken and written Chinese to participate in this Chinese ritual practice. Limiting factors like language contribute to Derrida's position that the production and organization of religious television is a national

phenomenon tied to national language and the nation-state. According to Derrida, religious programs do not take place on international networks and he gives an example of never having seen CNN broadcast the religious event in the form of a miracle or the "real presence" of a mass. Nothing shown on CNN is a sacred event.[197] However, how religious programs are broadcast internationally would depend on the source of the broadcast. As an example of an international entity, CNN has worldwide branch offices, but it is a form of commercial television using a news-based format, working for profit. Broadcasting live religious events would not fit with CNN's broadcast format. The Buddhist organization Tzu Chi is also an international entity with global branch offices but, according to Weishan Huang, Tzu Chi's transnational existence is cosmopolitan because it has a concept of Great Love for all human beings that is like a global moral community without suggesting a single political entity.[198]

Da Ai TV, produced by Tzu Chi, is available worldwide through satellite as well as Internet live streaming through its YouTube web channel. Moreover, a branch station of Da Ai TV has developed in Indonesia, which produces its own programs in Indonesian in addition to showing Taiwan's Da Ai TV programs such as those that contain the teachings of Cheng Yen. In such a case, the production and organization of this religious television channel is international and has broken beyond the borders of the nation-state and the limits of using one national language, Mandarin Chinese. The implications for Da Ai TV beyond national borders will be discussed in the following chapter, but for the moment we can see

[197] Derrida, 62.

[198] Weishan Huang, "Buddhist in Action: Transnational Migration and Religious Cosmopolitanism," *Encounters: An International Journal for the Study of Culture and Society* 4 (2011), 218.

that religious television can exist beyond the national Christian event that Derrida spoke of even though the ritual portion is still limited by language constraints, with participants needing to learn the Chinese pronunciations in order to take part.

While Buddhist rituals on television for lay practitioners is something new, the existence of Buddhist rites of worship themselves for lay practitioners is not a new phenomenon as evidence of daily ritual chanting can be found in pre-modern Chinese forms. One of the earliest records of Chinese Buddhist chanting comes from Chaozhi, a Buddhist lay devotee of the Three Kingdoms period (220-265 CE) who is attributed to have written a Buddhist chant called the *Yushan Fanbai*.[199] Much later evidence of lay ritual practice can be found during the Sung dynasty (960-1279 CE), when the Tiantai dharma master Cun Shi 遵式 (964-1032 CE) designed daily rites expressly for lay devotees to perform.[200] One point to highlight is that this Buddhist chanting has always been musical in the sense that the practitioners recite in a melodic voice. Pi-yen Chen notes that in colloquial usage, "the Chinese Buddhist sangha sometimes call monastic chants *changnian*, that is, singing-recitation."[201] This singing-recitation continues today in all Chinese Buddhist morning and evening ritual services in melodic patterns dependent upon the particular monastery or Buddhist institution. What is new is the usage of television to broadcast the event into the homes of lay practitioners for these practitioners to use as a guide in their own morning and

[199] Pi-yen Chen, "Buddhist Chant, Devotional Song, and Commercial Popular Music: From Ritual to Rock Mantra" *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Spring/Summer, 2005), 268.

[200] On Tsun-shih, see Daniel Stevenson, "Protocols of Power: Tz'u-yün Tsun-shih (964-1032) and T'ien-t'ai Lay Buddhist Ritual in the Sung." In Peter Gregory and Daniel Aaron Getz, eds. *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 340-408.

[201] Chen, 268.

evening ritual service at home. With television utilized in this way, viewers at home are not merely watching a program for education or for information as Derrida describes of Buddhist television in France, but are instead performing and singing the daily rites initiated by the sounds, melodic voices, rhythms, and subtitles that are transmitted by the television through both recorded and live broadcasts. Television in this way is not an instrument of entertainment, education, or information, but has become an instrument for ritual practice.

II. The Live Event

Besides the regularly broadcasted morning and evening rituals, the Buddhist stations also broadcast live ritual and ceremonial events. Where Derrida emphasized the uniqueness of the live event in the Christian ritual context, David Morley briefly wrote of its convenience in his work on television and cultural boundaries in which he describes a 'television geography' that breaks national boundaries by creating 'para-social contacts'. According to Morley, "these televisual forms of para-social contact can be celebratory – sometimes literally, as when a recent papal ruling concluded that, for the sick and the ill who are unable to go to church, the celebration of mass 'live', through television, was valid (though it was not if recorded and time-shifted on video because of the consequent loss of 'immediacy')."[202] Morley connects this emphasis on immediacy via live television by the Catholic Church to his argument that electronic media creates new experiences of virtual space and place and of virtual communities.[203] However, Morley's study focuses on

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[202] David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995), 131.

[203] Ibid., 133.

European secular television rather than further delving into religious television. The importance of live television broadcasts for ritual events in Taiwan was first studied by Mayfair Yang who did fieldwork studying the television broadcast of a rare pilgrimage of Mazu worshippers in Taiwan traveling to Meizhou Island in mainland China. According to origin stories, the goddess Mazu was born as a human girl on or near Meizhou Island in 960 CE. After her lifetime, she ascended to heaven and saved countless people at sea. A cult of worship developed around her that stretched over the centuries across mainland China and over to Taiwan. In 2000, Mazu worshippers from Zhenlan Temple in Taiwan wanted to pay homage to the maritime goddess and partake in rituals for her in her sacred place of origin, Meizhou Island, and they wanted the ritual to be broadcast live on television for the people in Taiwan as well. Mayfair Yang discusses the importance for the worshippers of the event being shown live in her work:

> This ability of television to tie together the world on television and the lived world of the viewer through simultaneous transmission and reception makes it a suitable medium for transmitting the power of religious and magical forces, especially in ritual performances. The "liveness" (現場直播, *xianchang zhibo*) of the simultaneous transmission and reception of the grand sacrifice ritual in Meizhou can be seen as a rare media-event in which ritual moments of sacred and divine presence were transmitted to viewers across vast geographical and political distances.[204]

However, in their quest for a live broadcast, the Zhenlan Temple managers struggled against Meizhou officials who wanted to use prerecorded audio rather than the live voice of the master of ceremony in the broadcast. Using prerecorded audio would have caused a fragmentation in the unity of the ritual sequence. According to Yang, "for Zhenlan Temple, it was essential that the master of ceremony's voice be part of the action of the ritual: her

[204] Mayfair Yang, "Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints" in *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 344.

voice must not only be in synchrony with the ongoing ritual, but also set its pace. The ritual had to have its own temporal integrity and cohesion; its parts had to share a common presence, unfragmented into different temporalities."[205] The importance of live TV for this event, then, was making sure that all participants in the actual ritual on Meizhou Island and the television viewers in Taiwan were all united in seeing, hearing, and participating in the same event at the same time. All viewers needed to be a part of the same 'immediacy' that Morley mentions of the live mass. Yang notes that in the end, the "live" broadcast was ironically fragmented by Taiwan's own commercial news media sources sent to cover the pilgrimage when they interrupted the event with commercials and other news items. The Zhenlan temple group's live broadcast suffered from its usage of commercial television for their event since commercial television can only operate through the revenue generated by airing commercials under the understanding that what is being broadcast is interesting enough to attract a large number of viewers.

Live on Life TV

Taiwanese Buddhists institutions that broadcast on their own channels do not have problems with commercials in televising their ritual events since it is the Buddhist organization itself that funds the broadcast and does not worry about how many viewers it attracts to stay operational. One example of this was in the broadcast of a ceremony shown on Life TV. On August 25, 2013, Life TV broadcasted a live feed of an annual International Offering Ceremony to the Buddhas and Sangha 國際供佛齋僧 that took place at Linkou Stadium at the National Taiwan Sport University in Taoyuan. The live broadcast of the day's ritual activities took place from 8:20 AM until 6:20 PM with a cut in the live feed around

[205] Ibid.

noon when there was a break time in the ceremony. During the break, Life TV returned to its regular program schedule, showing a pre-recorded sermon of Hai Tao. In the afternoon, the events at Linkou Stadium resumed and the live feed came back on for the afternoon and evening prayers. Throughout the live broadcast there were no commercial breaks to interrupt the chanting and prayers. Viewer-practitioners at home could follow along and chant and pray together with the members of the assembly by watching the events on television.

In Jacques Derrida's essay on religion and media, he reminds us that live television is not really live in the sense that there is always someone at the controls of the broadcast, producing what viewers see within a fraction of a second in a studio control room. The producer controls what views from the different cameras at the event will be shown and what will not be shown for the viewers at home. This is true of the live Buddhist ritual event for Life TV as well. During the prayer sessions, the cameras take turns showing images of the monks chanting, the Buddhist altar with its many Buddhist statues and images, interspersed with other images not present at the ceremony that represent the various Buddhas being paid homage to in the prayers. In addition, the video that was produced from this live production of the evening prayer at the event was then later reused by Life TV to create a new daily broadcast of the evening service. However, while the images on television change based on the controls of a producer, the audio of the live event remained streaming uninterrupted. As in Yang's study of the live Mazu ritual, for the Buddhist ritual chanting, it is the uninterrupted synchrony of voices in the ritual of the assembly with that of viewers at home that remains important.

No Narrative Separation

What differentiates Life TV's all-day broadcast of the ritual event from any commercial television live broadcast of an extended event, besides not having commercials,

is the absence of a television program narrator. On commercial television, for any extended event that is broadcast live, such as a sporting event or parade, there is usually a sportscaster or television narrator that serves as a guide for television viewers, speaking directly to the television audience, giving the viewers information on what is happening at the live event that viewers are not physically a part of. These television guides or narrators serve as television middlemen under an understanding that while the event is being broadcast live, the television viewing audience is separate from the live event and therefore needs a guide to know what is truly going on at the ground level of the event. Even though such events usually have ceremony masters or hosts on the ground or on stage with microphones who speak to the audiences who are physically at the event, the television audiences are usually separated from hearing what the ceremony master says on microphone. Television audiences hear what is told to them by the television personality who serves as the middleman between the live event and the television audience. This is how a live event is turned into a production for commercial television. A story is woven in real time by the television host or narrator and created for the television audience to understand what is going on.

During the live event for Life TV, there is no television narrator. There is only a television producer's control of the camera angles to control the visuals. All speaking is done by the actual speakers at the event, with the cameras zooming in on the different speakers. The experience of watching the event on Life TV is less like a production made for television viewing and more like watching the big screen seen at sporting and concert events, made for audience members who are sitting too far away to see the actual performers on stage or on the field. With big screens at large concert events, there is no separate narrator for the screen. The screen is a device used to magnify the visual element of the event while microphones and speaker systems amplify the voices and sounds of the live speakers for the

audiences sitting in the furthest rows. On Life TV, the television transmission of the ritual event serves more as a magnification and amplification for the audiences sitting furthest away from the stage, all the way at home. Seen in this way, audiences at home can have more of a sense of immediacy to the live event because there is no television narrator separating the television audience from the actual event.

Live on the Buddha's Birthday: A National Event

A major day for live ritual and ceremony on Buddhist television takes place on the Buddha's birthday. Both Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi hold major ceremonies in Taipei on that day that are broadcast live on their respective channels. On May 10, 2015, Fo Guang Shan began their televised Buddha's Birthday Festival and Mother's Day celebration on the boulevard right in front of the Presidential Office with President Ma Ying-jeou and many of Taiwan's political leaders in attendance. The events of the ceremony, composed of Buddhist songs and dances as well as song-prayers for prosperity and social harmony, were all televised live on BLTV with no commercial interruptions. On the same day, Da Ai TV did a live broadcast in the afternoon and evening of Tzu Chi's "Buddha's Birthday Prayers and Gratitude to Parents" ceremony at Liberty Square in front of the Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall which was also attended by Taiwan's president and other political leaders. According to Cheng Yen, over 400 Buddhist Dharma masters attended and participated in the group prayers.[206] This included Hai Tao of Life TV who could be seen standing together with the other venerable monks during the live broadcast.

While the Buddhist television stations usually avoid matters that deal with politics, major events like the Buddha's Day ceremony are the exception in which the two largest of

[206] Cheng Yen speaking on "Life Wisdom" 人間菩提 broadcast on Da Ai TV, May 11, 2015.

Taiwan's Buddhist institutions, Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi, make arrangements to have the annual ritual prayers take place in the most public of spaces with the closest connections to the national and municipal governments in Taiwan's major cities. The president and other public officials of Taiwan take part in the Buddhist prayers by sitting on the front stage of the assembly and praying together with the monks and nuns for the safety and prosperity of the people. In Tzu Chi's ceremony, the prayer spoken by everyone in the assembly included prayers to deities within the Buddhist pantheon to protect the Dharma and all living beings and prayers for the compassion and teachings of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha to spread to all people. The spoken prayer ended with praise and thanks to the Buddha and to parents and a final prayer for Taiwan:

> We pray that Bodhidharma strikes the great Dharma drum
> So loud that even the deaf can hear it,
> Sprinkling everywhere its flow and clarity to purify peoples' hearts.
> On this Buddha's Day 10,000 people praise and immerse in
> The grace of the Buddha and sincerely pray for and respect nature.
> On this Buddha Day 10,000 people praise and remember the kindness of their parents
> And are filial and do good, living in harmony and unity.
> We pray that all under heaven and the land of the nation will be stable
> And that society will be auspicious and peaceful
> Accompanied by sincerity with no disasters or hardships.
> We pray for Taiwan to be prosperous and for mother earth to be rich and fertile
> And for favorable weather and for the country and people to be safe and secure.[207]

The live broadcast of the prayers for the nation by the large congregation of monks and nuns might be considered an example of what Derrida characterized for religious television – that it is tied to the nation-state, since the president of Taiwan himself is present and prays together with the monastic congregation to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas for the peace and prosperity of Taiwan. However, such a connection between Chinese Buddhist

institutions and Chinese rulers is not a new one made only for TV. This relationship shown on the Buddha's birthday has precedents in the earliest records of Chinese history. During the Northern Wei dynasty in the early sixth century CE, the Buddha's birthday was a celebration that took the form of over one thousand Buddha images being paraded in canopy-covered carriages in the streets of the capital towards the imperial palace. It was a celebration of the Buddha's birthday as well as a time to pray and chant for the good fortune of everyone living in that era. The record of a sixth century eyewitness account describes the scene at the front of the palace gates:

> The emperor sprinkled flowers [in front of the palace]. At that time, the golden flowers sparkled in the sunlight and jeweled canopies floated like clouds. There was a forest of pennants and banners and the smoke from the incense was like a fog. The Brahman music and Dharma chanting loudly moved heaven and earth. There were a hundred shows and horses pranced about, making areas congested with horses side by side. Eminent monks and virtuous masters carried walking sticks, forming groups. Devotees and their Dharma companions held flowers, forming gatherings. Carriages and saddled horses filled the streets in great numbers, pouring over each other. At that time, there was a monk from the western regions. He saw this and sang out words proclaiming this was a land of the Buddha.[208]

One element that the Buddha's Day celebrations of 2015 in Taiwan share with the sixth century description from the Northern Wei dynasty is the cooperative efforts of the government and the Buddhist institution to celebrate the Buddha's birthday. The Northern Wei emperor sprinkled flowers before the parade of Buddhist images presented before the imperial palace in a celebration involving eminent Buddhist masters. Taiwan's President Ma

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[207] Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視, "2015 佛誕祈福孝親感恩," *YouTube*, May 10, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tpzj9vMDSh0&t=1232s. Accessed May 16, 2017.

[208] T 2092, j. 3, p. 1010b. For previous English translations, I referred to Kenneth Chen, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 278-279; Yang Hsüan-chih, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-Yang*, trans. Yi-t'ung Wang (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 126-127; John A. Silk, ed. *Buddhism in China: Collected Papers of Erik Zürcher* (Lieden: Brill, 2013), 511-512.

Ying-jeou prayed together with the monastic assemblies for the Buddha's Day celebration in front of both the Presidential Office and the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall. Throughout Chinese history, Buddhist monks have worked with rulers to offer thanks to the Buddha and pray and chant for the peace, prosperity, and security of the country. In both the pre-modern context and the 2015 assemblies, there is an offering of flowers as well as chanting and singing for this purpose. In the pre-modern context, no television was present to give people access to the event, but the parade of the thousand Buddhist images through the streets served to give everyone in the city a form of access since each Buddhist image paraded before the people was likely seen as a representation of the Buddha appearing before the people. In the modern context of Taiwan, the parade of Buddhist images on the Buddha's Birthday has been replaced by the television screen giving people at home access to the events of the ceremony and celebration live, with monastics and laity praying that the compassion and the Dharma of the Buddhas spreads to all people so that they can be filled with peace and happiness. From one angle, these two live events by Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan can be seen as national events because they include the participation of political leaders and prayers for a safe and prosperous Taiwan. However, this would not be enough to identify religious television as always being national and tied to the nation-state, since it can also be seen as a continued cooperation between religious and political entities that has existed since pre-modern times. Moreover, these events include prayers for all people and all living things to be protected by the Buddhist deities, making them events that are for the benefit of the nation as well as for the benefit of the world.

Rather than viewing these religious broadcasts as only a national phenomenon, they might be better viewed in the same light as the Buddhist organizations that produce them.

Both Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi have a national origin in Taiwan, but have since expanded to become international entities with branch temples and offices in countries around the world in an attempt to expand the influence of their Buddhist teachings. Concerning Fo Guang Shan, Stuart Chandler emphasizes that one of Hsing Yun's purposes in establishing temples globally was to affirm a Buddhist identity, regardless of ethnicity. According to Chandler, "the master encourages his fellow Buddhists to think of themselves, not so much as Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Thai, British, etc., or even as within the Mahayana, Theravada, or Vajrayana streams, but simply as Buddhists, all sharing a single tradition based on the teachings of Shakyamuni."[209] In this way, Fo Guang Shan initially is identified as a Chinese or Taiwanese Buddhist association, but it strives to be a global Buddhist association. For Tzu Chi, while Julia Huang emphasizes Tzu Chi's creation as significant in opening a public sphere for Buddhism and forming a civil society for Taiwan, she goes on to emphasize the importance of Tzu Chi in a global context. Huang notes four overarching motifs that stand out in Tzu Chi's international presence. First is envisioning a global community of Tzu Chi members who unite to build a better world through collective good works. Second is having a Buddhist notion of a universal connection of all living beings regardless of nationality. Third is making directly benevolent connections with charity recipients of different nationalities. And the fourth motif Huang identifies in Tzu Chi's international presence is the leader's charismatic appeal which inspires Tzu Chi followers to found overseas branches.[210] Both Buddhist organizations have an origin in Taiwan and are

[209] Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: the Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 272.

[210] Huang, 218.

identified as Taiwanese or Chinese, but their scope of influences stretches beyond Taiwan's boundaries. The same can be said for the Buddhist television stations these organizations have created. There is a national origin for BLTV and Da Ai TV, but their range and influence expands beyond the borders of the nation-state.

Praying with One Heart

After the live broadcast of the Buddha Day ceremony, Cheng Yen spoke of the event on the daily program "Life Wisdom" (*Renjian Puti* 人間菩提) the next morning, speaking on the importance of the event with all of its participants:

> More than 400 Buddhist Dharma Masters attended Tzu Chi's celebration, more than in prior years. These Dharma Masters, together with government officials and everyone at the event, prayed with one heart (*yi xin* 一心). May this sincere prayer reach and be heard by all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. It is truly not easy to have tens of thousands of people pray with one heart. It is very touching.[211]

In the previous descriptions of the importance of live ritual broadcasts, the wording used, such as the importance of the 'immediacy' of the broadcast and the need for the ritual to be 'unfragmented into different temporalities' touch on the importance of a unification of attendees in virtual space and present time for viewers to be a part of the ritual, but what is lacking in the Buddhist context is a Buddhist perception of the unity of the individuals practicing as one. This is what Cheng Yen speaks of when she says everyone prayed with one heart – that everyone at the event and even those participating via live television-viewing were united, beyond a sense of individuality, to act together as if everyone was one entity, praying for the peace and safety of all living beings. This concept of *yi xin*, which Tzu Chi has translated in Cheng Yen's talk as one heart, can also be translated as one mind.

[211] Shi Cheng Yen, "*Renjian Puti* 人間菩提," Da Ai TV, May 11, 2015.

The notion of *yi xin*, one heart or one mind, is a Buddhist concept that can be found in some of the earliest Mahayana doctrines written in China. In the earliest extant version of the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana Doctrine* from the sixth century, a definition of *yi xin* as the One Mind is the following:

> The Mind in terms of the Absolute is the one World of Reality (dharmadhātu) and the essence of all phases of existence in their totality. That which is called "the essential nature of the Mind" is unborn and imperishable. It is only through illusions that all things come to be differentiated. If one is freed from illusions, then to him there will be no appearances (*lakshana*) of objects [regarded as absolutely independent existences]; therefore all things from the beginning transcend all forms of verbalization, description, and conceptualization and are, in the final analysis, undifferentiated, free from alteration, and indestructible. They are only of the One Mind.[212]

The One Mind refers to that which encompasses all things and yet is beyond a conceptualization or differentiation into different or individual things or beings. It is the 'Absolute' or the totality of all things, without distinctions. The opposite of the One Mind would then be an understanding or a making of distinctions between things and people and objects. According to this Buddhist frame of identification, distinctions made at a level of phenomena are considered to be illusions. It is the illusion of our differences and individual selfish actions that cause suffering. So, when Cheng Yen speaks of praying together with one heart or one mind, she is referring to everyone moving beyond a sense of self, beyond a differentiation of the self from all other practitioners, to unite together in a sense of the One Mind described in the *Awakening of Faith* in order to end suffering. And she notes that it is not easy to get tens of thousands of people to pray with one heart, but this is what the modern technology of microphones and a live television broadcast can do. The live broadcast brings people into a moment of practice of one heart and one mind in which

[212] Aśvaghoṣa, Yoshito Hakeda, trans. *The Awakening of Faith: Attributed to Aśvaghoṣa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 39.

everyone is united in praying for safety, harmony, and for the wisdom of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to reach all people. And this unified one mind practice is only possible through a live broadcast that allows for an immediacy of the events unfragmented into different temporalities.

III. Using the Daily Television Ritual as a Temporary Sacred Space

Sacred Space in Previous Studies

Returning to the televised daily ritual services, what makes performing morning or evening service with the use of television different from simply using the Buddhist altar at home is the fact that the television was not designed solely as a tool for religious practice. A television set can be turned on and off and turned to several different programs, many of which would not be compatible as accompaniments to a Buddhist prayer service. And yet, when the television is turned on to the right channel at the right time in Taiwan, it turns the space around the television into a temporary sacred ritual space that was once only the domain of the Buddhist altar. This idea of a sudden sacred space as a result of a mechanical transmission is not completely a new phenomenon as it can be found in the works of Charles Hirschkind and Purnima Mankekar.

In Hirschkind's work on ethical soundscapes in Egypt, he never actually uses the phrase 'sacred space,' but his description of how Egyptian Muslims automatically react when tapes of the Quran are played, suggest that the space within earshot of the audio source has become sacred and therefore people must change from a mode of nonreligious action to one of respectful, ethical action. It did not matter whether the tape was played in the privacy of one's home or in an outdoor public space. If in the case of an outdoor public space,

Hirschkind describes how that space suddenly changes into a mosque-like atmosphere with admonitions for those who are not behaving ethically:

> Sermon and Quran tapes tend to bring with them some of the norms of sociability associated with the mosque: when they are played in a public location, such as a store or a bus, they produce an environment wherein certain styles of speech and comportment become marked as inappropriate and are likely to draw public censure from others present. "Don't act so rudely in the presence of the Quran"; "Shame on you, while the shaykh is talking about the Prophet."[213]

Hirschkind's point in highlighting such reprimands in public when hearing the Quran or sermon tapes played is to show how the playing of such tapes cause the listener to change the space that was one of secular activity only moments ago into a space meant for religious devotion through the listeners' feelings or beliefs and their actions associated with prayer either through discussion or physical devotional acts. In Hirschkind's words, "Quran and sermon tapes don't simply frame space discursively but also shape it sensorially by animating, below the threshold of consciousness, the substrate of visceral, kinesthetic, and affective experience that is integral to the tapes' ethical reception… As the intensifying background for practices of embodied sociability and moral discernment, such qualities may give rise to ethical performances as in the acts of public reprimand mentioned."[214] While Hirschkind emphasizes the listeners' automatic bodily responses in admonishing those not acting ethically before the sounds of the Quran or sermon tape, another thing to note is the value that the listeners place on the space in which the tape is being heard and the new identification of that audio space as one that is sacred and deserving of the ethical comportment that Hirschkind describes.

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[213] Hirschkind, 124.

[214] Ibid.

A different description of a sacred space that is perhaps a closer example to that of Taiwanese Buddhist television is in Purnima Mankekar's description of devout Hindu practitioners in India watching the television serial, the *Ramayan*, during the late 1980s and early 1990s. While Mankekar writes of viewers watching the *Ramayan* in the context of how the program was associated with Hindu nationalism, her descriptions of how the viewers prepared to watch the program, show an act of religious devotion centered on a television broadcast. Mankekar describes these devotional acts as *bhakti*, the personal relationship of surrender and devotion between a devotee and an object of worship. An important part of *bhakti* is *darshan*, the visual process of seeing the sacred that involves an engagement with the sacred through the act of seeing the deity as well as being seen by the deity. While *bhakti* and *darshan* usually take place when Hindu devotees go to a temple, Mankekar notes that they also took place when devotees watched the *Ramayan* television serial. She notes that *bhakti* "seemed to be an important form of engagement for many of the *Ramayan's* Hindu viewers; the fact that their *bhakti* was electronically mediated seemed to make little difference to them… [The] televisual medium seemed to encourage a particular form of *bhakti* through the visual process of seeing, or *darshan*."[215] In other words, devotees treated seeing the images from the television serial about the religious epic, the *Ramayana*, the same as they would treat seeing still images depicted from the *Ramayana* in temples. Mankekar gives an example of this from her fieldwork:

> I found that many viewers' *bhakti* was embedded in their everyday religiosity. For instance, Sunita Chandra, a middle-class woman of twenty, told me that her mother and grandmother would bathe and purify themselves before the serial came on, and would sit in front of the television set with their heads covered and hands

[215] Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 199.

> folded, just as they would while participating in a Hindu ritual or while getting the *darshan* of a deity. For them, there was little difference between reading the *Ramayana* and watching it on TV.[216]

From Mankekar's description of the devotional acts of the mother and grandmother, we see an example of viewers turning their television-watching experience into a ritual experience of religiosity. Bathing and purifying themselves before viewing the *Ramayan* television serial becomes equated with the ritual of purification and the *darshan* of a deity at a temple. The living room space that contains the television then becomes a temporary sacred space like that of a temple setting while the television is broadcasting the *Ramayan*, visually showing the epic story of the divine hero, Rama. The mother and grandmother in India sitting with hands folded while respectfully watching the *Ramayan* resembles the posture of Mr. Wu Shui Mu in Taiwan, mentioned above, who sat attentively listening to Cheng Yen speak on *Wisdom at Dawn.*

What differentiates Taiwanese Buddhist ritual programs from the *Ramayan* television serial in India is the purpose of the program and how different viewers can interpret the program. The purpose of the *Ramayan* television serial is to tell a story. While that story may contain elements that can be considered religious or interpreted as a form of *darshan*, the serial is nonetheless a story that anyone can watch regardless of religious affiliation. Indian Hindu devotees may have considered the watching of the serial to be another form of ritual and to be an important part of their culture and history, but Indian Muslim viewers had a different view. Mankekar summarizes her findings on Muslim viewers of the *Ramayan*:

> Some interpreted the *Ramayan* as an interesting (if quaint) story about an ancient Hindu king and his family. One woman told me that she learned things about Hinduism that she had not had the opportunity to find out about before. Most

[216] Ibid., 202.

> important, these viewers never described the *Ramayan* as representative of "Indian culture"; most of them claimed that the *Ramayan* was simply a story.

Because the *Ramayan* was a story told through a television serial, Muslim viewers could also view the story and get something out of it in the form of entertainment or new knowledge of Hinduism.

Taiwanese Broadcast Time Specifically for Ritual

In contrast to Indian national television's *Ramayan* television serial, the Buddhist rituals broadcast on Taiwanese television are not stories meant for entertainment. Viewers who tune in to the Buddhist rituals or skim over the channels have no other way to interpret the program other than as a Buddhist ritual that can be listened to or used as a ritual tool. For example, Ms. Mengyi Jian, age 39, the program planner briefly introduced in Chapter Two, is not a Buddhist practitioner and does not regularly watch the Buddhist channels, but she knows what the purpose of the ritual broadcast is for:

> Of course, they are broadcasting the prayers for their believers. It's because modern people are busy or their city doesn't have a Buddha Hall or temple, so they can conveniently turn on the TV and do the morning or evening service with the monk.[217]

She knows that the ritual programs are meant for daily prayers and has no interest in them herself. Because the ritual programs have no entertainment or educational value to her, she finds them to be "very boring" and so does not watch them.

A similar understanding of the ritual broadcasts from another television viewer comes from Ms. Sandy Chang, age 45, a public relations and marketing specialist who responded to my question on why she thought Buddhists broadcast ritual prayer by saying, "I think it is just their normal daily work… They just want to let people follow them to learn

[217] Interview, December 27, 2016.

the special song."[218] While Ms. Chang does not listen to the chanting broadcasts herself, choosing instead to sometimes listen to Buddhist sermons, her mother does listen to the prayer songs on occasion. When asked if her mother listens on purpose or if she just happens to stop on the prayer broadcast while channel flipping, she responded:

> Oh, my mom just flips through channels and suddenly she finds that the monks are chanting the songs she is familiar with, so she chants together, doing nothing else for a short period of time. She and my friends sometimes would listen to [the monks'] speech more than just listen to the chanting. My mother will do her own daily routine of Buddhist prayers. She chants by herself.[219]

Sandy Chang is someone who may occasionally listen to a Buddhist sermon on television, but does not watch and does not participate in the broadcasted rituals. Ms. Chang's mother, on the other hand, is someone who does the daily morning service on her own at her Buddhist altar and will sometimes sing or pray along with the chanting on television in the evening. As Ms. Chang notes, when her mother begins to follow along with the song-prayers, she does nothing else, concentrating on the singing or praying. This differentiates Buddhist ritual television programs as performative events rather than ordinary television programs that are watched passively for entertainment or information. Beyond Hirschkind's description of Muslim cassette sermon listening and Mankekar's description of television *bhakti*, this Buddhist form of televised ritual space is one that causes viewers to verbally participate through chanting and singing rather than only listen.

For a case of Buddhist television ritual watching with intention, we turn to Mrs. Coco Nguyen, age 34. Mrs. Nguyen intently turns her television on to Fo Guang Shan's BLTV during the afternoon service time to perform the ritual with the television together with her son. Mrs. Nguyen originally came to Taiwan from Vietnam fifteen years ago when

[218] Interview, December 26, 2016.

she first married a Taiwanese husband. She had two children from the marriage, with the oldest son being a fifteen-year-old high school student at the time of my meeting with her. After the marriage ended in divorce, she remarried a Vietnamese man also living in Taiwan and they have one young son together, age 3. She says her urge to go to the temple more often in recent years and watch Buddhist television all revolved around the birth of her young son:

> I started watching [Buddhist television] when I had this baby. I found out about him when I was already four months pregnant. And maybe because of him, he led me to have more of an affinity with the Buddha and made me like eating vegetarian food more and going to the temple…When I was pregnant but didn't know it yet, I suddenly wanted to go to the temple and take refuge. I even told my husband that I suddenly wanted to go to the temple and shave my head. My husband said, "Heavens! You're working full time and you suddenly want to shave your head!" In my heart, it was a sudden change just like that… Then, after my son was born, I just felt I wanted to go to the temple… Since the past, I've only known of going to the temple to make offerings. I didn't have the ability to do virtuous deeds. If the chance arises, then we do it. However much I can spare, I donate. Then when I was pregnant with him, suddenly I wanted to go to the temple… And then after I came back over here [to Taiwan] I wanted to go to the temple, but my feet hurt so much I couldn't go and it was a pretty far. I was afraid if I walked up there, I wouldn't be able to make it home… The nuns [at the Fo Guang Shan temple] saw my situation and they told me about channel 7. The nun said in the mornings on channel 7 from 6:00 to 6:30 is the morning service and in the afternoons, it's from 4:00 to 4:30, also channel 7. So, in the morning if you can't do it because you can't wake up, then do the service in the afternoon.

After Mrs. Nguyen was introduced to BLTV by the Fo Guang Shan nuns, she started to watch BLTV on channel 7 regularly at 4:00 PM. At first it was partially for her unborn baby (later newborn baby) to hear the sutra chanting. Later, when her son was old enough to sit up and follow along, she did the ritual together with her son and the afternoon broadcast:

> I'll start watching from before 4:00 and then do the sutra recitation [at 4:00]. Then, I take him in to take a bath and then we keep watching after that… I sit right in front of the TV, sitting on the bed because there isn't a lot of space. And I know that when I chant the sutras and recite the Buddha's name, it's from our hearts.… I know that I can't be on the bed, but there's no space [in my small apartment]. So, I can only do it

[219] Ibid.

> like this for now. When I have a chance in the future, I'll create an altar. It's only when you do have the chance but you still do it this way, then it wouldn't be right. Because I know that no one sits on their bed, but each time I chant the sutras, I put up the curtain because when it's time to chant, there's still a lot of sun and it comes through, so I think that it's based in our hearts…

The high-rise apartment space that Mrs. Nguyen's small family of three lives in contains only a bathroom and one small all-purpose room that contains a couch, a cooking space, a bed and a television that faces the bed. As she mentions, her current living arrangement has no space for a Buddhist altar. So, in this case, the television itself serves as a Buddhist altar when the ritual broadcast is on. Both she and her son sit on their bed, which serves as the prayer space, and face the television in kneeling position with palms together for the recitation. At other times in the day or evening, the television serves its original purpose as a means of entertainment when Mrs. Nguyen watches other programs and channels, but at the four o'clock hour, the television becomes the Buddhist altar as well as the chanting and sutra recitation device for Mrs. Nguyen and her son to follow along with. The all-purpose living room becomes a sacred space for prayer and sutra recitation. It becomes a sacred space as a result of Mrs. Nguyen's turning on of the television to the ritual broadcast and her physical actions of kneeling before the television and chanting along with the words and songs broadcasted on the Buddhist channel. The same can be said for Mr. Wu Shui Mu introduced at the beginning of the chapter when he turns his television on to Da Ai TV's morning service at 4:30 AM every day. In Mr. Wu's case, his living room has enough space to create a Buddhist altar for the bodhisattva Guanyin above the television. Mr. Wu's television becomes a complimentary ritual implement used in conjunction with the traditional Buddhist altar. For Mrs. Nguyen, the television becomes the Buddhist alter itself when she and her son bow to the Buddhist images shown on television during the afternoon/evening ritual. The "event" of religion takes place on television and right in front

of these television sets in the living rooms of Taiwan when the viewers do their Buddhist practice together with the singing and chanting happening on the Buddhist channels.

IV. Modern Prayer Song for Modern Living

While ritual for most of the Buddhist stations is composed of broadcasts of the one-hour morning and evening services and special weekly prayer rituals for Buddhist devotees at home, Da Ai TV adds one more televisual prayer element for its Tzu Chi members with its short three to five-minute prayer song that is played three times a day at 7:30 AM, 1:30 PM, and 5:30 PM. Most Tzu Chi volunteers do not wake up for the hour-long 4:30 AM broadcast of Tzu Chi's *Fa Hua Jing Xu*, which praises the Buddhas and the *Lotus Sutra*, but they can tune in to Da Ai TV in the morning, noon, or afternoon times and pray along with the three-minute song, created from words and prayers of Cheng Yen's discourses. Mrs. Chen Yu Bao, introduced in the beginning of the chapter, was shown on Da Ai TV praying together with the "Prayer" song in her home. The lyrics to the daily three-minute version of the prayer song are as follows:

> In my heart, I feel deep gratefulness
> All my heart is filled with sincere prayer
> From all corners of the world
> Let us join our hearts and pray
> For a world of harmony and peace
>
> From my heart, I pray
> May we join our hands, our hearts as one
> Spread the seeds of Great Love
> Nurture wisdom evermore
> Let us fill the world with hope
>
> In my heart, I feel deep gratefulness
> May all the Buddhas hear my prayer
> All united with one heart

Let us end our hate with love
May there be no suffering year after year.[220]

A longer five-minute version of the prayer song includes a repetition of the last verse right after the first verse. One aspect that makes this slow, tranquil prayer song different from the traditional morning and evening services, aside from the much shorter length, is that it was composed as a song for Tzu Chi, following modern patterns of melody and musical accompaniment, to be easily sung by anyone watching Da Ai TV or participating together in Tzu Chi group assemblies. The only form of identification that this prayer song is Buddhist is in the single line "May all the Buddhas hear my prayer." All other lines contain words of prayer of a general nature, seeking a common coming together of people to pray for the ending of hate and suffering and filling the world with peace and harmony. It is a prayer that any Da Ai TV viewer can join in praying or wishing for – ending hate and suffering in the world.

The song was created by Guo Mengyong 郭孟雍, a long-time musician and songwriter who has written over 300 songs for Tzu Chi and received guidance from Cheng Yen in the writing of each song. Originally released in 1986, the song was used annually in Tzu Chi's year-end prayers together with other songs involving prayers for peace and harmony. In 2008, with natural disasters in different countries making headlines, like Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and the Sichuan earthquake in China, Tzu Chi volunteers in branch offices around the world began singing the prayer song on a regular daily basis as a way to pray for an end to suffering. This also became part of Da Ai TV's daily broadcast schedule as well, repeated three times a day. Speaking on the Da Ai TV song program

[220] Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視, "[傳唱年年] 2016415 – 祈禱" *YouTube*. Apr. 15, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdHZzSpb6Oc. Accessed Feb. 18, 2017.

Chuan Chang Nian Nian 傳唱年年, Guo described what a person's ideal frame of mind should be when singing or listening to the prayer song:

> Regardless of whether one wants to sing this prayer song or if one wants to listen to the prayer song, you must really be attentive and grasp your heart and make it calm. In still thoughts, one comes to a realization. This is what's called the condition of the heart-mind, the condition of emotion and the condition of thought. I want everyone while they are in the process of singing to often have no way to hear their own voice. With this "Prayer" song, if in the process of singing it, one can grasp one's heart and pacify it, and then carefully listen for one's own voice, and then in that process still listen to the voice of others, I think that in this way one can grasp this prayer song's level of meaning, character, and the complete expression that comes out. This is what *Shangren* has told us. The condition of the heart-mind, the condition of emotion, and the condition of thought.[221]

Based on Mr. Guo's ideal, the singing of the prayer song is not the same as simply singing any song. The act of singing the song becomes a practice of calming the mind similar to traditional practices of Buddhist chanting and meditation. It is a very short practice that can be used in Tzu Chi group meetings as well as by individual television viewers who hear it played on television, serving a double purpose to help calm the individual's mind as well as unite in a prayer with all those praying at the same time for peace and harmony in the world.

Tzu Chi volunteers who work with Tzu Chi in proximity to a television can turn on the television to Da Ai TV during their work, pause from their work during the song to pray together with the broadcast, and then return to what they were doing shortly afterwards. Audrey Hsu, for example, works with Da Ai TV at the Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Center in Taipei. I had a chance to talk with Ms. Hsu during one of my visits to Da Ai TV. She told me that she decided to become a Tzu Chi volunteer after she started working for Da

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[221] Guo Mengyong speaking on "*Chuan Chang Nian Nian.*" Broadcast on Da Ai TV April 15, 2016. Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視, "[傳唱年年] 2016415 – 祈禱" *YouTube*. Apr. 15, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdHZzSpb6Oc. Accessed Feb. 18, 2017.

Ai TV and found that Tzu Chi was a good organization. In her office, shared with other employees, is a television turned on to Da Ai TV during the day. She says that usually at 1:30 PM when the prayer song is playing, she will put her hands together, face the TV in the office and silently pray together with the broadcast. As a Tzu Chi member, she takes part in weekly Tzu Chi meetings that meet to discuss Cheng Yen's teachings on Buddhist sutras and she will sometimes go to volunteer activities, but beyond that she does not do any kind of praying, chanting, or meditating at home. The three-minute prayer during the day serves as her regular form of ritual.

I witnessed this small Tzu Chi ritual for myself during a visit to one of Tzu Chi's Jing Si bookstores in Taipei. I stopped by one day to chat with one of the Tzu Chi volunteers about Da Ai television and the activities that take place at the center. While I was talking with Sister Zhuang, one of the volunteers, at one of the tables over tea that she had offered me, I noticed that the television on the high shelf against one of the walls was turned on to Da Ai TV. It was 1:30 PM and the prayer song had just started playing. While Sister Zhuang continued to tell me about the center's activities, I noticed that the Tzu Chi volunteer seated behind the counter, who was not interacting with any other visitors at the moment, was facing the television with her hands together in silent prayer. When the prayer song ended, she brought her hands down out of prayer and continued with what she was doing before the song started.

From the two examples above, the prayer song can be considered something that is convenient to participate in and at the same time it is something that unites viewers in a prayer for the world. Ms. Hsu working at Da Ai TV will put her hands together in prayer when she happens to be in front of the television with the prayer song on, but it is not something she has to do if her work takes her away from the television. At the Jing Si

bookstore that I visited, the Tzu Chi volunteer behind the counter joined in the prayer because she was not busy with attending to any visitors at the moment. Had someone else come in at that moment, then she would have cheerfully attended to that visitor's questions or needs as with Sister Zhuang who was attending to my questions about the bookstore's activities. Viewers can pray together with the song if it is convenient to do so, but there is no rule that anyone must do so. It is a matter of sincerity to partake in the ritual song rather than doing so out of ritual obligation. It is a sincerity that takes the form of a daily ritual, which is in contrast to the notion that ritual actions in the modern era have been replaced by a search for sincerity beyond the emptiness of ritual.

The relationship of sincerity versus ritual has recently been analyzed by Haiyan Lee in her study of the loss of the art of presentation as it existed in classical theatrical performances based on a system of ritual actions. Presentation and ritual have been replaced in the modern era by representation of emotion as people continually search for sincere expression in order to find happiness. In Lee's essay, she gives several examples of how there have long been movements or sincerity revolts to move away from ritual practices that had been considered empty of their original meaning. "Major examples of the sincerity revolt against what it deems the hypocrisy of ritualism include Buddhism (against Hinduism), Mohism (against Confucianism), Protestant Christianity (against Catholicism), and today's garden variety fundamentalisms (most notably Evangelicalism and Wahhibism)."[222] In Lee's examples, the rituals of the previous systems had lost their effectiveness, opening the door for movements that sought the expression of a sincere truth beyond empty rituals. While her focus is not on religion, Lee's notion of a decline of ritual within modern societies resembles

[222] Haiyan Lee, "Chinese Feelings: Notes on a Ritual Theory of Emotion" *The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*, Vol. 9.2, June 2016, 13.

what Benedict Anderson and Jürgen Habermas have written of concerning the decline of religious communities that contribute to a theory of secularization for the modern world. As Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors note in the introduction to their work on religion and media, the "secularization theory" has been criticized by a number of scholars including Talal Asad, José Casanova, and Peter van der Veer, but "the decline of religion in the public sphere continues to be largely taken for granted as an intrinsic feature of modernity in public debate and in the media."[223] The daily prayer song broadcast on Da Ai TV stands in contrast to the position that actions of ritual have been replaced by actions for sincerity as well as the position that religion has no part in the public sphere in media because the singing of the prayers is a combined act of sincerity and ritual that takes place on television, a medium of public broadcast. By singing and praying for an end to suffering they are sincerely searching for happiness for themselves as well as for the world.

People who are participating in singing with the short-broadcasted prayer song are likely doing so with several other hundreds or thousands of Tzu Chi volunteers as well, all praying for peace at the same times of day and at the same pace of unison based on the guidance of the broadcasted song. The broadcast itself is not a live ritual broadcast, but the act of praying together under the television's guidance creates an act of praying with one heart just as in the live ritual broadcast above.

V. CONCLUSION

The existence of daily Buddhist ritual prayers on television is a sign that both ritual and religion are not in decline in Taiwan and have not been completely replaced by secular

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[223] Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, eds. *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 4-5.

expressions of representation in the public sphere. Rather than ritual being replaced by a search for sincerity in order to find happiness, the act of ritual itself is the act of sincerity for people who have not found happiness in a modern commercial world and are looking for an alternative to material gains for the self. The broadcast of ritual on television makes it more accessible to those who cannot or do not attend temple rituals and also unites a greater number of ritual practitioners through virtual space, creating an imagined community of Buddhist chanters. These participants are not only united by way of using television in their practice, but are united in the very time and pace at which they sing their prayers, both through recorded daily services as well as broadcasted live events. While the live ritual event for religion, in general, finds its importance in the immediacy of the event, unfragmented into different times, the live event in the specific Chinese Buddhist context also finds its importance in the concept of *yi xin* (one heart or one mind) in which all practitioners are united in the act of prayer in a way that moves their individual prayers beyond a notion of individuals and towards the Buddhist concept of the totality beyond distinctions of individuals. Praying with one heart becomes possible for greater numbers of people through live television.

Outside of live television, the daily broadcasts of recorded morning and evening services serve an equally important function for Buddhist practitioners as markers of time and tempo for individuals performing daily services, but also as tools to help viewer-practitioners keep or regain a sense of tranquility when faced with the stress and challenges of each day. In this way, ritual television does not follow a chronological progression of time that moves forward towards new developments that outdo older actions, but is instead an example of circular time in which individuals are reminded each day to consistently follow the same path of ritual practice and Buddhist teachings in order to avoid the pitfalls of

suffering caused by materialistic desires. Materialistic desires are ever-present in modern life and it is the sincere prayers that individuals regularly partake in through individually-initiated ritual or television-assisted ritual that help people to move beyond those materialistic desires.

Taiwanese Buddhist television during times of major celebrations, like the Buddha's Day ceremonies, shows that it is related to the nation or nation-state in which it originates, as Jacques Derrida characterizes of religious television in general, but this is only a result of a long historic relationship that Chinese Buddhism has maintained with the governmental and authoritative institutions. The major Buddhist institutions that originate in Taiwan have become international entities since their founding and the next chapter will examine their global influence in relation to the use of television and modern media.

Chapter Five

Beyond Nation and Beyond Television

In *Modernity at Large,* Arjun Appadurai writes of the disjunctures that take place between economy, culture, and politics as different groups of people migrate across the globe, creating imagined worlds that have definitions beyond being identified under any single nation-state.[224] The way in which people identify themselves is influenced by geographical location, but also by the reception of different forms of information from mass media produced both within a nation and beyond national boundaries. This applies as well to global viewers of Taiwanese Buddhist television who create identities for themselves in relation to their Buddhist television watching that goes beyond simply identifying as citizens of the countries in which they reside. This chapter examines the effects of placing Taiwanese Buddhist television programs into a context of international viewing through satellite television and into an Internet context in which video clips stream on Internet sites such as YouTube and Facebook. Mass media that is used for information and entertainment is constantly changing and each medium has different technical properties that open new vistas and opportunities. The use of new media also brings new problems and challenges that Buddhist producers must face as they adopt new mass media formats. Shi Quen-Feng's 2007 survey on Buddhist television in Taiwan revealed that for survey participants, who mostly ranged in age from 31 to 60, television was used more than the Internet as the medium of choice for receiving Buddhist information. Of the survey participants, 14.8% of those surveyed marked they received their information on Buddhism from television, but only 2.4% of the participants marked they received their Buddhist information from the

[224] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 32-33.

Internet.[225] However, several of my informants between 2013 and 2016 talked about using the Internet on their cell phones, laptops, and tablets to access mass media, suggesting Internet usage for information and entertainment is a growing trend.

Today, many Internet users check on their social media accounts to see the news and postings of friends and family that can range from family pictures to political messages accompanying pictures or videos to support or criticize political leaders and governmental policies. My own Facebook list of friends also includes friends who share Buddhist media postings. An example of such a friend is Patrick, a resident of Hong Kong, who I originally met on a Buddhist temples tour program in China in 2011. Throughout the week, besides sharing comedic videos based in popular culture, Patrick also shares videos by the Venerable Hai Tao, who established and preaches on the Taiwanese Buddhist channel Life TV. One example is Patrick's sharing of Hai Tao's social media post from March 27, 2017. In the short video clip, Hai Tao speaks before an audience on one of his preaching tours about protecting all living beings and maintaining good relationships with others. The ninety-nine second video clip is titled, "Work is necessary to maintain life, but you must not directly or indirectly harm living beings. More so you must perform many good deeds and make many

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[225] Of the 685 valid survey participants, 24.2% of the participants were in the age range of 31-40 years old. Another 33.9% were in the range of 41-50 years old. And 19.1% were in the range of 51-60 years old. Besides television and the Internet, other sources survey participants received Buddhist information from included print material, family and friends, and live sermons from monastic speakers. See Shi Quen-Feng 釋泉峰 (Yen-ting Liao 廖晏霆), "佛衛電視慈悲台與生命電視台之比較研究 Religious Market and Religious Marketing: A Comparative Study on "Buddha Compassion TV Station" and "Live TV"" (M.A. Thesis, Nanhua University, 2009), 101, 175.

good friends through working."[226] One week after its original posting, the data under the video showed that the video had 15,000 views, over 1,200 "Likes" and 323 shares by Facebook members such as Patrick. The original video was uploaded under the Facebook account name "Master Hai Tao's Journal" 海濤法師日誌, which was created in 2009, listing Hai Tao has a public figure and including links to Life TV's webpages as well as Life TV's live broadcast online. These short video clips shared by viewers like Patrick on social media are one way in which the television teachings of Taiwanese Buddhist preachers break out of their television boundaries and adapt to the modern lifestyles of technology users who view videos daily on their smartphones and tablets rather than through programs from a traditional television set.

Beyond simply breaking through the boundary of the television medium, these videos also break through national boundaries. A scan of the names of those who clicked "Like" on Hai Tao's video clip shows viewers living in Taiwan as well as Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Australia. Hai Tao is a Taiwanese monk, transferring his sermons from television to Facebook, but Patrick, who is Chinese-Canadian in his late 20s, watches and shares Hai Tao's videos from Patrick's residence in Hong Kong.

Jacques Derrida wrote that religious television in its production and organization was a national phenomenon, always tied to national networks and a national language, in his argument that Christian television was unique with its live broadcasts of religious ritual. [227] Hai Tao's video segments and programs may have started out as a television production of

[226] Hai Tao, "工作是維持生活之所需，但不要直接間接去傷害到眾生，更要透過工作的方便廣結善緣," 海濤法師日誌@haitao2013, Facebook. March 27, 2017.

[227] Jacques Derrida, "Above All, No Journalists!" in Hendt de Vries and Samuel Weber, eds. *Religion and Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 61-62.

Taiwanese Buddhism that fit into Jacques Derrida's description, but through Internet forms of social media and video sharing as well as through international television branch networks like Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV in Indonesia, Taiwan's Buddhist television has spread beyond national borders to reach international audiences. This television phenomenon beyond nation fits more with what Arjun Appadurai has written concerning electronic media and the mass migrations around the world that make up viewership of media: "Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces."[228] This Buddhist media usage is a form of globalization, but it goes against the notion of globalization that David Morley writes of concerning transnational corporations using consumer driven marketing strategies to create 'global citizens' and exploit global markets.[229] Going against globalized consumerist strategies that dominate mass media and societal trends, these Buddhist viewers in different countries align more with what Manuel Castells has called a 'resistance identity' because the viewers are building up a resistance on the basis of principles that are opposed to the dominant principles permeating society.[230] However, the examples of groups that Castells uses for 'resistance identity' have all used violence to attain their goals. If viewers of the Taiwanese Buddhist programs are not violent, can Castells's 'resistance identity' still be applied to their situation? This chapter addresses relations between globalization and concepts of identity beyond nation as they pertain to viewers of Taiwanese Buddhist television programs outside of

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[228] Appadurai, 4.

[229] David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995), 109-110.

[230] Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Malden: Blackwell, 1997), 8.

Taiwan. This chapter also examines the benefits of Internet transmission capabilities as well as limitations and unforeseen consequences when Buddhist video clips are reposted by private individuals and the mainstream media.

I. Buddhist Television Beyond the Nation

The audience for Taiwanese Buddhist television programs is neither limited by the medium of traditional television nor by the political boundaries of Taiwan. Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV, Fo Guang Shan's BLTV, Life TV, Hwazan TV, and Buddha Compassion TV (BTS) are all accessible around the world through satellite television and through Internet streaming. And the Tzu Chi viewers of Da Ai TV outside of Taiwan can still be found watching Master Cheng Yen's programs as a group in Tzu Chi meetings in different countries. An episode of "Tzu Chi This Week" on Da Ai TV shares the stories of Tzu Chi volunteers in Indonesia who express their feelings of inspiration concerning the morning Tzu Chi group meetings that they take part in every day in which they receive Cheng Yen's teachings via video and television program. The segment introduces Tzu Chi volunteers in Indonesia who wake up at four o'clock in the morning to meet at the main Tzu Chi meeting hall in Jakarta. They listen to Master Cheng Yen speak on the program "Wisdom at Dawn". In the segment, one participant, Jia Wenyu, gives her thoughts on the program and on their morning meetings:

> Watching the "Wisdom at Dawn" broadcast in the morning helps us focus on the teachings Master Cheng Yen tries to pass onto us. It is different than watching "Wisdom" at home. The Dharma can purify our hearts and motivate us to inspire more people to join our ranks.[231]

Another participant, a young woman named Marisa Stephanie, also gives her thoughts:

[231] Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視. "[Tzu Chi This Week] 20140503." *YouTube*. May 2, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3y73kHH1Zs&t=356s. Accessed Jan. 14, 2016.

> With the teachings passed on by Master Cheng Yen, they are close to our daily lives. After attending the morning Dharma study group, I have seen dramatic changes in my life. It has motivated me to continue my good affinity with the master and the Buddha.[232]

Jia Wenyu and Marisa Stephanie both participate in the same kinds of morning meetings, watching Cheng Yen on screen and discussing Cheng Yen's teachings, just as Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan do. And through the video, they feel a closeness to Cheng Yen even though the Buddhist speaker is 2,000 miles away in another country. Through Tzu Chi's global activities and Da Ai TV streaming and broadcasting to various countries, people who become Tzu Chi volunteers outside of Taiwan develop an affinity for the Buddhist leader living in Taiwan, desiring to even visit the Still Thoughts Abode in Hualien, which Tzu Chi identifies as a "home" for all people. When Tzu Chi members around the world "come home" to the Tzu Chi Abode in Hualien, they are not going to a home based in a shared sense of history or nationality but one based on a shared Buddhist sense of compassion for all beings and admiration for Master Cheng Yen who influenced their lives through Tzu Chi's mass media and social networking.

Julia Huang identifies this aspect of worldwide pilgrimage to Tzu Chi's Still Thoughts Abode in Hualien as one of two forms of circulation for a charismatic movement. Pilgrimage to Hualien from Tzu Chi members in Taiwan and Tzu Chi members worldwide is a centrifugal flow of people immersing themselves in the world of Tzu Chi to transform their lives. A centripetal flow takes place when Cheng Yen herself circulates around Taiwan to Tzu Chi's various branch centers. According to Huang, both flows of convergence by members to the Abode and divergence of Cheng Yen to the various branches function to

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[232] Ibid.

form a vertical tie between the headquarters in Hualien and the individual followers worldwide.[233] Since Cheng Yen does not leave Taiwan, the broadcast of her teachings on Da Ai TV worldwide serves as a substitute for her actual presence. Programs like "Wisdom at Dawn," shown at morning Tzu Chi meetings in Indonesia and throughout the world, help to solidify this connection with members, allowing the Tzu Chi volunteers of the different countries, like Marisa Stephanie, to see and hear Cheng Yen speak. The members develop an affinity for the Buddhist leader despite the vast separation of distance.

An International "Homecoming" to Taiwan

Da Ai TV and Tzu Chi's worldwide activities play an international role in indirectly promoting trips to Taiwan as a means of pilgrimage as members of Tzu Chi consider Hualien to be the point of origin for Tzu Chi and all Tzu Chi members to "come home" to Taiwan when they travel. This phenomenon of a group identifying a location in Taiwan as a home for all people creates an international connection as those who are affected by Tzu Chi in positive ways through the missions of charity want a chance to visit the Tzu Chi center of origin.

I witnessed an international "homecoming" of Tzu Chi volunteers in November 2013 when I was invited to attend a ceremony in which Cheng Yen was present to certify international volunteers at the Tzu Chi center in Sanchong. Tzu Chi volunteers from twenty-five countries flew in to Taiwan to participate. One testimonial from a Chinese couple in their 50s, living in Norway, related their Tzu Chi experience of watching Da Ai TV as they both stood on the stage of the grand assembly hall. The husband, Mr. Yu Huai Yi, said that his wife often watched Da Ai TV and Master Cheng Yen on the Internet through her

[233] Huang, 122.

computer. When she initially encouraged him to watch with her, his first response was to say, "She is your master. Not my master. I want to watch my own TV shows!" However, he eventually gave in and tried watching Da Ai TV together with his wife and then joined his wife in becoming a Tzu Chi volunteer. Speaking on his feelings for Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi, Mr. Yu said, "Even though we live in Norway, such a faraway place, we feel that *Shangren* lives together with us. We have become disciples of *Shangren*. We open our hearts and take a vow to follow *Shangren* with determination and to assume the responsibility of promoting Tzu Chi's mission."[234] Through Da Ai TV accessed on the Internet, Mr. Yu and his wife became Tzu Chi volunteers in Norway, dedicating themselves to Tzu Chi's cause. And through the access to Da Ai TV from the Internet they feel a closeness to Cheng Yen, just as the Tzu Chi members in Indonesia do, despite the actual vast separation of geographical distance between Taiwan and Norway.

While this couple's testimonial represents the effects of Tzu Chi's international outreach through media, it also shows the limitation of influencing mainly Chinese communities worldwide. This is something Julia Huang has also noticed in her fieldwork on Tzu Chi branches in the US, Japan, and Malaysia where "ethnicity is a salient cultural boundary."[235] The purpose of Buddhist organizations like Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan is to spread the teachings of Buddhism to all people around the world, regardless of ethnicity, but their efforts are still only having limited success as the centers end up attracting more Chinese participants and volunteers than participants and volunteers of the local ethnicities.

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[234] The events of the day, including this English translation of Mr. Yu's statement were broadcast on Da Ai TV on an episode of "*Renjian Puti* 人間菩提." See "人間菩提: 20131118 覺悟人生最富有." Online video clip. *Da Ai TV*. Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, Nov. 18, 2013. Web. Accessed May 15, 2017.

[235] Huang, 246.

When the native citizens of a country do become involved in a Taiwanese Buddhist organization like Tzu Chi or Fo Guang Shan, it is usually through the introduction of Taiwanese who have moved to that country for work. Native citizens from countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Haiti did also attend the November 2013 event and expressed their gratitude directly to Cheng Yen at the meeting through words of appreciation as well as through song and dance. What is shared in their experiences is that they were introduced to Tzu Chi through Taiwanese Tzu Chi volunteers who were living and working in the respective country. And their welcome to Taiwan was considered a "homecoming" as can be seen in Cheng Yen's opening remarks:

> This year we have volunteers from Haiti, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mozambique returning to be certified. We also have volunteers returning from Chile, which is very far away. I heard that their returning flight [to Taiwan] took 36 hours and their trip going back will take 44 hours.[236]

Even though the trip for the citizens of these different countries may have been their first trip ever to Taiwan, Cheng Yen's word choice of "returning" to Taiwan implies that as volunteers of Tzu Chi, they can always consider the Tzu Chi headquarters to be their home. Beyond their national identity, they can identify themselves as members of the Tzu Chi global community and always return home to Tzu Chi in Taiwan when they have the chance.

While the main purpose of Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan, which also maintains worldwide branch temples, may not be to bring international attention to Taiwan, the activities that they do internationally is reminiscent of the activities of the modernizing Chinese monk Taixu, (1890-1947) who received support from the Republic of China in the

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[236] Shi Cheng Yen, Sanchong, November 16, 2013. "人間菩提: 20131118 覺悟人生最富有." Online video clip. *Da Ai TV*. Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, Nov. 18, 2013. Web. Accessed May 15, 2017.

1930s. Before 1937, China's Nationalist government supported Taixu's international travels to seek international recognition for China as a world power rather than as a colonial territory.[237] After 1937, Taixu was again supported by the Republic of China during his world tour, but this time, to promote its cause in the fight against Japanese aggression. While Taixu may have indirectly aided the Republic of China in seeking recognition, his primary purpose was "to worship at Buddhist holy places, to visit with Buddhist leaders in each locale, to help foster the feelings of being joined together in one faith, and to preach transformation through the Buddha's Dharma."[238] For contemporary Buddhist organizations like Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan, that establish branch centers worldwide, the main purpose may be to promote Buddhism, but they also end up promoting Chinese culture and bringing attention to Taiwan as the origin center of the given Buddhist organization and as a place that international visitors might wish to return to in the future for spiritual pursuits among other reasons.

International Non-Buddhist Audiences

As stated in chapter two, the Buddhist television producers at Da Ai TV use a variety of programming strategies to attract different viewers. Whereas devout Buddhists may prefer listening to a sermon directly from Cheng Yen, non-Buddhist viewers would rather watch a drama for enjoyment. In both cases, Da Ai TV caters to the preferences of both groups while transmitting the same Buddhist messages. This strategy is no different when Tzu Chi media operates in branch centers in other countries.

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[237] Charles Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 165.

[238] Don Pittman, *Towards a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Presss, 2001), 140.

The Buddhist missions abroad are flexible in being able to adapt to the local cultures to attract local attention. Beyond Cheng Yen's "Wisdom at Dawn" being shown in morning meetings in Tzu Chi's Jakarta branch center, Da Ai TV has its own affiliate station in Indonesia. This station broadcasts a combination of locally produced Indonesian programs that include Indonesians of the majority faith of Islam who are also Tzu Chi volunteers as well as Taiwanese Da Ai programs subtitled in Indonesian. Having Da Ai TV accessible in Indonesia in this way introduces Indonesians to the Tzu Chi organization and Buddhist teachings on compassion, morals and ethics that can be shared by people of all faiths without forcing anyone to change religions.

The fact that there are Tzu Chi volunteers of different faiths was first shared with me by the associate general manager of Da Ai TV, Michael Chang:

> The good thing about Tzu Chi is they never try to convince people to become a Buddhist. That's my observation because I wasn't a Buddhist before I joined Tzu Chi. And after [that], I found there are so many high-ranking people in this organization that are Muslim, that are Christian, or some people like me.[239]

In Cheng Yen's own words in answering the question of what responsibilities are required of Tzu Chi members, being Buddhist is not a requirement but Buddhist teachings do influence what members are required to do:

> There are two things that need to be done by Tzu Chi commissioners and members: help the poor and educate the rich. Not all rich people are loving people. Buddha said that each of us has a loving heart. People, however, have become habitually selfish… It is the Tzu Chi commissioner's duty to educate the rich and to reveal the love in their hearts…[240]

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[239] Interview, July 2, 2013.

[240] Shih Cheng Yen, *Still Thoughts: Volume Two* (Taipei: Jingsi Publications, 1996), 226.

Tzu Chi is an organization that helps those in need around the world, regardless of race or religion. The philosophical foundation upon which the organization operates is the Buddhist teaching of compassion, but the members and volunteers need not be Buddhist if all members have a compassionate heart and are willing to help spread that teaching of compassion to others. In this way, Tzu Chi attracts members and Da Ai TV viewers who have different faiths.

A Da Ai TV broadcast of the program "Da Ai Headlines" in Taiwan on July 16, 2014, highlighted one such Indonesian Tzu Chi volunteer. The program introduced Inda Dewi Farida, a devout Muslim who had lost her adult son in a plane crash in 2005. Mrs. Farida searched for answers to life's impermanence by studying the Quran. Around the same time, she chanced upon Cheng Yen speaking on Indonesia's Da Ai TV and felt a connection between what Cheng Yen taught on television and what Mrs. Farida was studying in the Quran. According to Mrs. Farida, "The more I studied the Quran, the closer I felt to Master Cheng Yen. I have opened my heart completely and accepted the will of heaven. This is the role model I've been searching for all my life. As long as it is the right thing to do, I shall carry on."[241] According to the program's narrator, Mrs. Farida began collecting Da Ai dramas and Tzu Chi publications and eventually became a volunteer working with Tzu Chi, even encouraging her husband to make monthly contributions to support Indonesia's Da Ai TV. The segment ends with Mrs. Farida saying, "When your heart wants to do good deeds, you have to take action because compassion can't wait. We must follow after Master Cheng Yen and set an example for others. Every penny of our donations should be properly

[241] Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視, "[Da Ai Headlines] 20140716," *YouTube*, Jul. 16, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CytcKrHe6o&t=32s. Accessed May 15, 2017.

used."[242] While Buddhism and Islam have different philosophies concerning religious practice, one shared aspect that the Da Ai TV program focused on in broadcasting Mrs. Farida's words was the concept of compassion. Compassion is what Cheng Yen often speaks of in her talks on Da Ai TV and this is what drew Mrs. Farida closer to Tzu Chi as she watched Da Ai TV in Indonesia. Through hearing Cheng Yen's teachings on compassion, which Mrs. Farida found to be compatible with her own knowledge of Islam, she chose to join Tzu Chi in Indonesia and do volunteer work to contribute to Tzu Chi's mission of compassion for all people.

During my time in Taiwan, I met an Indonesian student, who also encountered Tzu Chi through Indonesia's Da Ai TV. An Indonesian national of Chinese descent, Regina Fortunata, age 25, told me about how she and her mother became attracted to Tzu Chi through watching the Tzu Chi dramas on Da Ai TV in Indonesia:

> Before, I didn't watch Da Ai TV at home. But then my cousin introduced us. She's not Buddhist. She's Christian, but she said every day after she got home, she liked watching Da Ai TV programs. She said it was because they showed a drama every evening and that gave her encouragement because Da Ai TV dramas are all true stories. The lives [of the people in the dramas] before was very hard, but then after they joined Tzu Chi, their lives got better. My cousin knew that my mother was Buddhist, so she suggested to my mom to watch Da Ai TV. Two years ago, when I returned home to Indonesia, I told my dad I wanted Internet because our house didn't have Internet. After I installed it, my cousin told me that I could also install satellite TV to watch Da Ai TV… And now my mom watches Da Ai TV every evening.[243]

Both Regina and her mother became attracted to Tzu Chi's Buddhist goals of compassion. And because the dramas contain very general teachings to give people encouragement in their lives and are not overtly Buddhist in their presentation, a non-Buddhist viewer like Regina's Christian cousin could enjoy watching as well.

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[242] Ibid.

[243] Interview, August 1, 2013.

Regina told me one more reason she likes the Da Ai dramas – "They have morals." The element of morals that Regina mentions is present in the stories of the Da Ai dramas as well as in the sermons of Buddhist monastic speakers who preach on the various Buddhist channels. Where devout Buddhist practitioners will listen to the Dharma spoken by a Buddhist monk or nun because they prefer direct teachings from a Buddhist master, general viewers who do not practice Buddhism and watch television for entertainment, like Regina and her cousin, can receive a similar message of inspiration concerning morals and ethics by watching the Da Ai dramas. In this way, the purposes for watching Buddhist television is different for Buddhist devotees and for general television audiences, but the effect of learning about morals and ethics to apply them to daily life is the same.

In Indonesia, far from the original source of the broadcast in Taiwan, it is these moral teachings through the Taiwanese Buddhist dramas that influence Regina's mother to want to participate in Tzu Chi volunteer activities. At the same time, it is the moral teachings as taught by Cheng Yen in a sermon format in her morning talks that influence Tzu Chi volunteers, Jia Wenyu, Marisa Stephanie, and Inda Dewi Farida to volunteer in their own community and to want to have a closer affinity with Cheng Yen. For these viewers, the lesson is the same and the medium of television is the same, but the format of television broadcast is different for the different audiences – monastic lecture for devout religious practitioners and television drama series for general audience viewers. This division is not necessarily exclusive as the case of Mrs. Inda Dewi Farida above shows in her listening to Cheng Yen's teachings while also collecting and watching Da Ai TV drama series.

Taiwanese Pride

Not only does Da Ai TV serve to connect international viewers with Cheng Yen's teachings in Taiwan, but it also serves to connect Taiwanese viewers with what the Tzu Chi organization does internationally, filling some viewers with a sense of inspiration and pride at what Taiwanese can do in the world. Ms. Zhou Jialing, age 32, is not a member of Tzu Chi, but watches Da Ai TV news as well as Da Ai documentary programs. According to Ms. Zhou, "I like to see the lives of other people and see the positive actions that they are doing with their lives, such as their recycling efforts to save the environment."[244] In terms of how she is inspired, she says:

> The news stories are very positive and the Da Ai programs that speak of positive Tzu Chi activities around the world, like on the news, gives me a positive feeling about being Taiwanese because I see that even people from such a small place like Taiwan can make a big difference in the world. That makes me feel proud and at the same time it also influences me to take my own small steps at home in terms of being mindful in trying to correctly separate recyclables from trash and being mindful in my everyday life of trying to be positive and do positive actions in my own environment. News programs on other channels are too commercialized with too much product placement advertisement that it's ridiculous. Da Ai TV news is free of that kind of commercialization.[245]

Ms. Zhou sees the international relief and charity efforts of Tzu Chi through Da Ai TV as being acts that represent Taiwan on a global stage. While Taiwan is not recognized in the world as a sovereign state, Taiwanese Buddhist missions like Tzu Chi's relief efforts and Da Ai TV's broadcasts help to bring attention to Taiwan. The Taiwanese Buddhist missions serve a dual purpose abroad of bringing the name of Taiwan to other countries and bringing pride to the name of Taiwan for the Taiwanese themselves.

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[244] Interview, June 29, 2013.

[245] Ibid.

Ms. Zhou's response does not directly mention anything Buddhist, but she is influenced to be mindful of her everyday actions because those actions can have a positive influence on the people and the environment around her. While she does not watch the lecture programs of Cheng Yen, Cheng Yen herself often speaks on the need for people to be mindful of their actions and understand how human actions can influence the natural environment. So, the message Ms. Zhou comes away with through watching the news and documentary programs on Da Ai TV is the same message that Tzu Chi members get through listening to Cheng Yen's talks either directly in the Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien or on Da Ai television programs like "Wisdom at Dawn." The different television formats of news, documentary, and monastic sermon on the different mediums of television and the Internet are serving the same purposes for different audiences.

II. Migration, Identity, and Resistance

Against a National and Consumer Identity

The phenomenon of Taiwanese and Chinese migrating to countries abroad, like Mr. and Mrs. Yu in Norway, and connecting with Tzu Chi through television on the Internet to become Tzu Chi volunteers resembles the conditions that Arjun Appadurai has put in place for his theory on imagined worlds that break from national boundaries as a result of electronic mediation and mass migration. Of importance to how members of the Chinese diaspora create a new identity for themselves in countries abroad because of interactions with Chinese Buddhist media are two descriptions that Appadurai makes on the fragility of identity creation for migrant families in foreign lands and identity creation in the face of global advertising. Appadurai describes the difficulties migrant families and communities face in reproducing a cultural identity in foreign lands in competition with identities that

become created as a result of the consumer mass media that these communities encounter where they live and work:

> The pains of cultural reproduction in a disjunctive global world are, of course, not eased by the effects of mechanical art (or mass media), for these media afford powerful resources for counternodes of identity that youth can project against parental wishes or desires. At larger levels of organization, there can be many forms of cultural politics within displaced populations (whether of refugees or of voluntary immigrants), all of which are inflected in important ways by media (and the mediascapes and ideoscapes they offer).[246]

In other words, migrants that come from country A and end up living and working in country B attempt to maintain the cultural identity they imagine from country A, but can have difficulty doing so as the media from country B influences viewers towards either a country B identity or a general identity of a country B 'consumer'. This difficulty in maintaining or imagining a cultural identity is compounded by factors beyond nation that relate to a global interplay of production and consumption in part of which Appadurai labels the consumer aspect as the *fetishism of the consumer*. Appadurai elaborates:

> As for *fetishism of the consumer*, I mean to indicate here that the consumer has been transformed through commodity flows (and the mediascapes, especially of advertising, that accompany them) into a sign, both in Baudrillard's sense of a simulacrum that only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent, and in the sense of a mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production. Global advertising is the key technology for the worldwide dissemination of a plethora of creative and culturally well-chosen ideas of consumer agency. These images are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser.

This fetishism of the consumer applies to both migrant communities as well as native communities of a country, shaping their buying choices and habits as well as how they identify themselves as individuals. What Appadurai also stresses in his work on globalism is

[246] Appadurai, 44-45.

that when mass media is experienced together by a community, sodalities can be created. According to Appadurai:

> Collective experiences of the mass media, especially film and video, can create sodalities of worship and charisma… They are communities in themselves but always potentially communities for themselves capable, of moving from shared imagination to collective action. Most important… these sodalities are often transnational, even postnational, and they frequently operate beyond the boundaries of the nation. These mass-mediated sodalities have the additional complexity that, in them, diverse local experiences of taste, pleasure, and politics can crisscross with one another, thus creating the possibility of convergences in translocal social action that would otherwise be hard to imagine."[247]

So, there are at least two forces at play. An outer force from national and global media that attempts to shape the identity of individuals in terms of national citizenry and producer-consumer relations and an inner force from community members who attempt to fight against national and global media or to adapt the media to form a community identity in their own way. Appadurai's last description above fits well with global Tzu Chi members who join into Tzu Chi communities. They have a shared sense of admiration for Master Cheng Yen and an imagination for a world filled with compassion that is possible through collective action. This collective action is not based in ethnic or local identity, but based in a shared group identity founded on Tzu Chi Buddhist principles. Tzu Chi communities are indeed transnational and mass-mediated through the use of television, video-conferencing, and Internet streaming. As the examples of the Tzu Chi volunteers above demonstrate, convergences in translocal social action also take place because of diverse local experiences through the interactions of Taiwanese and Chinese migrants who introduce Tzu Chi to members of global local communities. This helps to create collective action at the local level through volunteer work to help those in need. A Tzu Chi Buddhist identity is created, which

[247] Appadurai, 8.

may start out within the boundary of Chinese migrants and immigrants, but does also include people of various ethnicities as Tzu Chi continues to break through the limitations of national and consumer identities.

The Alternative: Merging a Consumer Identity with a National Identity

The above Buddhist strategy of identity formation is not the only alternative path a community can take when faced with globalization. Another path possible is one of merging a religious identity with both nationalist and globalist aims. This is what Sudeep Dasgupta demonstrates in looking at the merger of globalization with Hindu nationalism. I include Dasgupta's example as a means of comparing two different alternatives to the dominant globalist perspective. Dasgupta deals with concepts of identity-formation, the constitution of a public sphere and the question of an aura in visual culture, in looking at relationships between Hindu nationalism and consumerism. After national television was introduced to India, an effort was made to keep national television anti-consumerist as the government under Jawaharlal Nehru maintained an independent, secular, and socialist path. However, in the 1980s with the failure of Indira Gandhi and her son to modernize the nation-state, there was a rise in the Hindu Right movement, which embraced greater involvement in the global economy, arguing that such involvement fit within their Hindu nationalist position termed, *Hindutva*. This was in conjunction with satellite television channels and television commercials becoming dominant on Indian television, leading to a dominance of consumerism, which Hindu nationalists saw as a positive occurrence. According to Dasgupta:

> Part of the success of Hindu nationalism has been precisely to structure the promises of religious chauvinism with those of globalization, marrying an empowered "Hindu" identity to that of consumerism. In this blurring of the sacred and the profane, one encounters a paradoxical reactivation of the aura. Precisely through its embeddedness in discourses of globalization and consumerism, Hindu identity stakes a place in the contemporary world as a supremely modern phenomenon. At the same time the earlier discourses of consumerism as Western decadence are replaced by

> that of a nation freed from its past mistakes (an insular, secular, and socialist burden) and fully engaged in the fruits of globalization without sacrificing its cultural identity, its "spirituality."[248]

In Dasgupta's case, global media and consumerism is not fought against to maintain an imagined traditional identity, but is embraced and adapted to define an independent, cultural, and spiritual identity under Hindu nationalism. This form of spiritual identity formation with Hindutva leanings is spread to the Indian diaspora along lines of modern mass media by Hindutva organizations:

> The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; a leading Hindutva organization) now offers *cybershakas* (physical drills) on the Internet where one can sit in one's room anywhere in the globe and participate in the regular exercises and drills of the organization using one's computer. E-Prarthana, an Internet site, provides the faithful with the daily opportunity to offer prayers ("click on a deity"!) to more than 450 temples in India "for all your personal and business needs and get the blessings shipped to you." For every archana performed, devotees are guaranteed two free gifts such as a designer Ganesha clock, while the site's "shopping mall" provides the instantaneous purchase of statues, books, cassettes, and CDs. The dissemination of Hinduism throughout the globe, through the activities of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Overseas Friends of the BJP, the RSS calling itself the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) outside India, and several affiliate organizations and networks of support such as the American Hindu Students' Council and other "cultural heritage" organizations, as well as numerous religious groups and foundations set up by diasporic Indian Hindu communities, particularly in the West, are clear evidence of the bankruptcy of a view that sees narrow, sectarian, national or subnational, and premodern responses as the necessary outcome of globalization.[249]

From the Hindu nationalist position, embracing globalization and consumerism is a strength that becomes part of the communal identity.

However, this identity is limited to those who can be identified within the confines of the definition of a Hindu nationalist, which has boundaries of ethnicity, cultural heritage, and

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[248] Sudeep Dasgupta, "Gods in the Sacred Marketplace: Hindu Nationalism and the Return of the Aura in the Public Sphere" in Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, eds. *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 268.

[249] Ibid., 262.

language. The diasporic groups that Dasgupta mentions above all have Indian Hindu roots and help to form Indian Hindu communities outside of India. The sodalities that are created through the initiation of Chinese Buddhist migrants also begin with boundaries of ethnicity and language, but these boundaries are not an absolute divide that cannot be overcome. Unlike the case that Dasgupta describes, an identity based in the sharing of ideals with a Buddhist community can initially be taken on by people who are neither Chinese nor Buddhist as the above examples in Indonesia show. And because the Taiwanese Buddhist media take a position against materialistic profit, their associated websites do not have any links to help users with business needs. The prevalent links found on Taiwan's Buddhist Life TV, Da Ai TV, BLTV, Hwazan TV, and Buddha Compassion TV are links leading to sermons on Buddhist teachings and other Buddhist channel programming as well as information about the Buddhist organization and upcoming events or program specials. These all contribute to the viewer/practitioner building a Buddhist identity based in selfless compassion rather than a national identity related to economic gain in a globalist system.

Resistance in Identity Formation

Through the sodalities founded on teachings that come through Buddhist media spaces, Chinese migrants, as well as local communities that are influenced by Chinese migrant introductions to Buddhist media, find an alternative identity that might be termed as a resistance identity that is different from the national identity expounded by a nation's mainstream media and different from a consumer identity which develops out of the mainstream globalized media, both described above in the excerpts from Appadurai on counternodes of identity and fetishism of the consumer. This idea of a resistance identity has been brought up by Manuel Castells in his proposition of three identities that are constructed

in the context of power relationships.[250] Castells proposes the following three identities. 1) A legitimizing identity is one introduced by dominant institutions of society to extend their domination. 2) A resistance identity is one created by those in positions devalued by the logic of domination and so they build trenches of resistance based on principles different from those of the dominant institutions. 3) A project identity is one in which people "build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure."[251]

Castells focuses on the concept of resistance identity, emphasizing that it creates forms of collective resistance against oppressive global forces. Religious examples that he uses for resistance identity include forms of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism. In the case of Islamic fundamentalism, Castells quotes Bassam Tibi for the reason of Islamic fundamentalism's rise in the face of globalization:

> For Tibi, "the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East is inter-related with the exposure of this part of the world of Islam, which perceives itself as a collective entity, to the processes of globalization, to nationalism and the nation-state as globalized principles of organization." Indeed, the explosion of Islamic movements seem to be related to both the disruption of traditional societies (including the undermining of the power of traditional clergy), and to the failure of the nation-state, created by nationalist movements, to accomplish modernization, develop the economy, and/or to distribute the benefits of economic growth among the population at large. Thus, Islamic identity is (re)constructed by fundamentalists in opposition to capitalism, to socialism, and to nationalism, Arab or otherwise, which are, in their view, all failing ideologies of the post-colonial order.[252]

Castells gives a similar reason for the rise of American Christian fundamentalism:

> The most immediate sources of Christian fundamentalism seem to be twofold: the threat of globalization, and the crisis of patriarchalism… A recurrent theme of

[250] Castells, 7.

[251] Ibid., 8.

[252] Castells, 17.

> Christian fundamentalism in the US at the turn of the millennium is opposition to the control of the country by a "world government," superseding the US federal government (which it believes complicit in this development), enacted by the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, among other international bodies. In some eschatological writings, this new "world government" is assimilated to the Anti-Christ, and its symbols, including the microchip, are the Mark of the Beast that announces the "end of times." The construction of Christian fundamentalist identity seems to be an attempt to reassert control over life, and over the country, in direct response to the uncontrollable processes of globalization that are increasingly sensed in the economy and in the media.[253]

For Castells, both forms of religious fundamentalism create a resistance identity against a perceived threat of a loss of local control of life, culture, and traditions when faced with globalizing forces that want to make everyone the same through consumer products and mass media entertainment. This globalization, according to David Morley and Kevin Robins, "is about the organization of production and the exploitation of markets on a world scale"[254] Morley and Robins go on to identify a new meaning for 'consumer', connected to globalization, writing, "A universalizing idea of consumer sovereignty suggests that as people gain access to global information, so they develop global needs and demand global commodities, thereby becoming 'global citizens'.[255] This notion of global citizen under the influence of capitalistic flows across transnational boundaries is what communities forming resistance identities under religious fundamentalism are defending themselves against. In Castells's examples, such community identification has led to violence as Islamic fundamentalists form radical and terrorist groups to fight against a global modernity that excludes their religious values. In the American context, identifying with Christian

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[253] Ibid., 28-29.

[254] Morley and Robins, 109.

[255] Ibid.

fundamentalism has led to militancy in such movements as the fight against abortion, a movement that "symbolizes all the struggles to preserve family, life, and Christianity, bridging over to other Christian denominations."[256] Religious fundamentalism serves as a prime example of the formation of a resistance identity against being devalued or excluded under a globalization movement.

However, religious movements do not have to be violent or militant fundamentalist movements to take on a resistance identity against globalizing capitalist market forces. In Gareth Fisher's work on Buddhist groups in mainland China, Fisher identifies members of Buddhist communities who create new personal narratives and new imagined communities of Buddhist practitioners to cope with marginalization in a Beijing society in transition from a centrally planned system to a market based framework. These Buddhists practitioners experience a moral breakdown from their inability to be identified as succeeding members of an increasingly capitalistic framework and search for an alternative identity, which can also be considered a resistance identity. According to Fisher, "Many of these practitioners aim to resolve these prolonged breakdowns by combining Buddhist teachings with recycled elements from China's past modernization projects to take on new forms of personhood as moral reformers, which involve them in new forms of exchange within an imagined community of like-minded practitioners."[257] In Fisher's work, these new communities are based around unofficial lay Buddhist leaders who meet with Buddhist practitioners in the outer courtyards of Buddhist temples. They are influenced as much by the lay Buddhist

[256] Castells, 27.

[257] Gareth Fisher, *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 203.

speakers as they are by the books, CDs and DVDs of famous Buddhist preachers like the Australian-based Venerable Chin Kung that are distributed in these temple courtyards.

Fisher focuses on a case study of Buddhist practitioners in one temple in Beijing and emphasizes their strategy of adopting Buddhism to cope with moral breakdown, but I include his example into a larger phenomenon of a Buddhist version of building a resistance identity against profit-driven globalization. The above examples of Tzu Chi members in Indonesia show that Tzu Chi usage of transnational mass media can influence the formation of communities based on an identity of a lay Buddhist volunteer. However, the Tzu Chi community identity is also a resistance identity against consumerism as the following example from Da Ai TV's *Renjian pusa* 人間菩薩 program shows. On an episode of *Renjian Pusa*, which shows the lives and activities of individual Tzu Chi volunteers, viewers are introduced to Mr. Tan Xiang Hua 譚祥華 (Indonesian name Awaludin Tanamas), a business owner in Indonesia. The video begins with Mr. Tan speaking about his past activities:

> I used to spend my weekends window-shopping. Sometimes I also went abroad for sightseeing. When others disobeyed me and made me angry, be they my family or employees, I yelled at them. I never considered others' feelings.[258]

During his story, the program shows scenes of an airport to represent his trips and a recreated scene of Mr. Tan working in his company, directing employees and sitting at his office to show his periods of anger. Next, he talks about his first encounters with Tzu Chi and the influence of Master Cheng Yen on his life:

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[258] Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視, "[人間菩薩] 譚祥華 ([*Renjian pusa*] *Tan Xiang Hua*)", *YouTube.* May 19, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xx1zXEMlD-w&t=1s. Accessed Apr. 19, 2017.

> In 1996 my business partner invited me to donate to Tzu Chi. Indonesia had an economic downturn in 1997 and Tzu Chi helped many people. I joined and began visiting the poor, retirement homes, and orphanages. Master Cheng Yen's talks helped me realize that all along I'd pursued a materially satisfying life and forgotten to help others. I also realized a simple life can be a happy one… The combination of poverty and illness truly leads to great suffering. After seeing others' suffering, I'm very grateful. I'm healthy enough to give and do good for society.[259]

While viewers hear Mr. Tan talk about his Tzu Chi experience, the video shows him volunteering with Tzu Chi, wearing the blue and white Tzu Chi volunteer uniform. The video also shows a segment of Master Cheng Yen on television, representing how Mr. Tan hears Cheng Yen's teachings, through the medium of television. Through his activities with Tzu Chi and listening to the teachings of Cheng Yen, Mr. Tan moves beyond a consumer identity that only brings pleasure to the self and he takes on a Tzu Chi identity that makes him part of a community to help less fortunate people in local society. He gains a sense of self-fulfillment. Although Mr. Tan is of ethnic Chinese origin, in the video he speaks Indonesian, leading to the possibility of spreading the Tzu Chi philosophy to native Indonesian audiences, since obtaining a Tzu Chi Buddhist identity is not strictly limited to ethnicity or language.

A Tzu Chi Buddhist identity becomes a form of resistance identity because its principles are opposed to the dominant principles permeating society concerning the notion that personal happiness must be obtained through capitalistic consumerism and material wealth. The video profiles from Da Ai TV, like the one on Mr. Tan, are meant to show that becoming successful in business and searching for fulfillment through buying products and personal trips can still leave a sense of dissatisfaction in life. Unlike the examples from Castells on religious fundamentalists and Fisher's examples on Beijing residents rejected from Beijing's capitalist framework, many members of Tzu Chi are not examples of people

[259] Ibid.

who were rejected from or devalued in the dominant institutions of society. On the contrary, before encountering Tzu Chi, many started out as people who were successful in their private businesses. However, this success in accumulating wealth did not lead to the happiness that consumer advertising seemed to promise as people were still filled with anger and stress in a work-life centered on gaining material wealth.

For Tzu Chi members, life must be based in compassion for all beings and this can be accomplished through volunteer work to help others rather than a business or consumer life that only focuses on the self. Mr. Tan turned away from consumer goals and business-centered goals and found a fulfillment instead through the Tzu Chi community which acts beyond consumer or national identity. The Tzu Chi Buddhist identity can be considered a resistance identity against the dominant socio-economic framework. Castells identified a resistance identity as one that seeks to find a global alternative to an oppressive global order from a position that has been devalued by the dominant institutions. The Tzu Chi Buddhist examples show that a global alternative can also be sought out from a position of success that has become disenchanted or disillusioned with the dominant framework. And unlike the examples from Castells, a resistance identity from a religious standpoint does not have to be one from a position of religious fundamentalism. From a Chinese Buddhist position, the resistance identity can be a non-aggressive community identity.

III. Buddhist Television Beyond Television

Returning to the example at the beginning of this chapter of Patrick sharing Venerable Hai Tao's sermon clip on Facebook, the video clip is suggestive of one direction mass media is taking as mainstream media producers gear their television programs for digital streaming formats on the Internet through their company websites as well as video

streaming services, catering towards growing audiences that do not watch programs on traditional television sets. On many occasions in Taipei, when I sat in a café with my informants like Ms. Mengyi Jian, the freelance TV program planner, to escape the intense summer heat and humidity outside, Ms. Jian would have her laptop open as she spent part of the time working on her next television project and part of her time watching the latest episode of the popular Taiwanese television drama of the time. With her laptop serving as her work and entertainment station, she hardly ever sat in front of a traditional television set to watch programs. At one point, I asked her if she thought this was a changing trend in television watching, to which she replied, "Yes. Now more and more people don't watch TV programs on TV on time. Maybe because they work late for their job or are out partying, or dating or in a meeting, they then miss the time to watch the program they want to watch." So instead, they watch at their own convenience on an Internet streaming format like Ms. Jian.

Mobile Reminder and Encouragement

While mainstream television programs are broadcast online on a for-profit basis with online advertisements, limiting the viewership to within national boundaries in which those advertisements can influence product purchases, Taiwanese Buddhist Internet broadcasts have no such boundaries to limit viewership and are accessible around the world and on any streaming device. During one of my visits to the Life TV branch center near Zhongxiao Xinsheng station in Taipei, I met Ms. Yuan An Chen, age 43, who works in a small company doing phone order sales of coffee beans. She had come to the branch center to make a donation to Life TV. She told me that since she did not have to meet customers face to face, she spends every day watching Buddhist television on her iPad while she works, watching a mix of Life TV, Hwazan TV, as well as Da Ai TV. When I asked her opinion on whether she thought watching Buddhist television every day has any influence on her, she replied, "It

does. It serves as a constant reminder to Buddhists not to over indulge in pleasures of the body, mouth, and mind and that we must always cultivate our line of thought on the Buddha Dharma."[260] When asked if she sang or chanted together with broadcasted chanting times, she answered, "Sometimes. During the evening service, I recite the sutras together [with the broadcast] or if I'm not familiar with a sutra, I'll use [the broadcast] to learn how to recite it."[261]

Ms. Chen's response to the influence of Buddhist television supports a point made in Chapter Three which stated that when listeners hear public speech by religious speakers, it can result in pious dispositions and modes of expressions that facilitate the practice of religious virtues and ethical comportment. This point was first made by Charles Hirschkind concerning Muslim cassette sermons in Egypt, but I apply it to the phenomenon of Buddhist television and Buddhist streaming media in Taiwan as well.[262] What is different with streaming devices for Buddhist television is that this reminder for ethical comportment is now not limited to the television screen of the living room or even the video screen of a Tzu Chi meeting hall. While this is very much like what audio cassettes could already do in making religious teachings mobile, the live aspect of the Buddhist television broadcast as well as the visual element are added in an Internet stream. This means that if Ms. Chen chose to use her iPad or other mobile electronic device to aid her in her evening prayer, keeping in sync with the prayer broadcast, then she could do so at home in front of an altar or even on the go in her work place. The mobility of an electronic streaming device allows for the convenience to carry the broadcasted Buddhist teachings anywhere to help remind the

[260] Interview, November 29, 2013.

[261] Ibid.

Buddhist adherent to always cultivate a Buddha mind as opposed to thinking of indulging in the pleasures of body, mouth, and mind as Ms. Chen puts it. Ironically, the portable electronic device that was made for convenience and consumer enjoyment is adapted by Taiwanese Buddhist television producers to help viewers cultivate a mind against materialistic tendencies for bodily enjoyment. The Buddhist goal of maintaining a mind focused on cultivating Buddha Wisdom is aided by technology when adherents have more frequent access each day to Buddhist teachers who constantly remind the listeners of the Buddhist path and practices.

Ms. Mei Lu, age 45, also uses a handheld electronic device to read and listen to teachings by Master Chin Kung on Facebook and to access YouTube to listen to the teachings of various Buddhist masters while she works at home caring for her mother who is quadriplegic. What is important for Ms. Lu in listening to these Buddhist teachers is that they give her encouragement in the work that she does in caring for her mother because they emphasize teachings of filial piety. In an online Facebook conversation that I had with Ms. Lu after I had already returned to the U.S., she shared with me a YouTube link to a video of a speaker named Tsai Li-Hsu, who spoke on the *Di Zi Gui* 弟子規 (Standards for Students), a Qing dynasty book which contains Confucian teachings on moral behavior that are also shared in an animated cartoon on Life TV and BLTV called *Zhong Hua Di Zi Gui* 中華弟子規 "The Chinese Standards." According to Ms. Lu, Tsai Li-Hsu was becoming more popular as he was teaching about moral behavior:

> I listen to teacher Tsai's speech every day, who is also Chin Kung's student… I listen to it when I feed my mom juice or meals. The link I attached is really great. He teaches people to respect parents, family, teachers. It is worth listening to. That's why this teacher is kind of famous now… The *Di Zi Gui* is a good book to teach you

[262] Hirschkind, 106-107.

> how to be a good person for your family, your country, for the world. To get a good education and knowledge are not just for making good money in the world. It's for helping more people who need our help in the world… The media that is prevalent now gives news, housing prices, commodity prices, and every kind of celebrity gossip. That makes children turn into realists who are more into materialistic satisfaction.[263]

What Ms. Lu gets from listening to Chin Kung's disciple on YouTube through her iPod is the same as what viewers watching Chin Kung on television would get – a message teaching about the need to help other people in the world rather than to accumulate money for the self. She is very specific in her view that the mainstream media transmits the idea that people need to be materialistic – a position that works against people having good relations with others. The Buddhist speakers lecturing on the Confucian moral values in the *Di Zi Gui* work to turn this around. As I asked further about her listening to the *Di Zi Gui* teachings, Ms. Lu continued to explain why listening while she cared for her mother was important to her:

> I want to hear more of what I want to listen to in order to make me feel I am right on what I am doing now! As you know I am taking care of my mom, but most of my friends don't agree with me. They always suggest I hire someone to take care of my mom. I can't do that. Parents give to us all their lives. How can people become so selfish when parents get older or sick? That's why I need to listen to something that gives me more encouragement to make me feel happy and make me feel I am right to do what I am doing now.[264]

Ms. Lu feels a sense of responsibility and filial piety towards her mother that Chin Kung and Tsai Li-Hsu teach about. She listens to the teachings as she cares for her mother. The act of caring for her mother is the act of compassion that Buddhist preachers teach about. The act of listening to Buddhist speakers while she does the act of compassion gives her a sense of encouragement and reinforcement that what she is doing is right.

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[263] Online conversation, April 10, 2017.

[264] Ibid.

On an episode of *Puti Xinyao* 菩提心要 (Essence of the Bodhi Mind) on Da Ai TV, viewers are introduced to Mr. Dong Jiande, the general manager of a fast food chain. The narrator introduces Mr. Dong, describing how he listens to Master Cheng Yen's sermons by transforming his cell phone into a portable sutra when he encounters setbacks and afflictions at work. The video of the program shows Mr. Dong in his office accessing one of Cheng Yen's video sermons on his smartphone. Mr. Dong speaks about his cell phone Dharma access saying, "When afflictions arise, they easily cause problems and lead us to create karma. So, at any time, I can pick up my cell phone and tune into Da Ai TV to watch Master's teachings. This helps settle my mind."[265] So, viewing or listening to Buddhist teachings on mobile devices can serve multiple purposes. 1) They remind the viewer or listener to constantly cultivate wisdom and compassion as opposed to indulging in self-enjoyment. 2) They encourage the viewer or listener in his or her act of compassion and reinforce the notion that the acts of moral behavior being fulfilled are the correct course of action. 3) They help the practitioner settle his or her mind during a work day filled with the stresses of the responsibilities in a capitalistic society – like being the general manager of a fast food chain.

IV. The Freedoms and Limits of Chinese Language Buddhist Teachings on the Internet

The recent strategy from Buddhist organizations and Buddhist adherents has been to adopt the usage of social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube to break the teachings of Buddhist monastics into short video clips or short Buddhist teachings that

[265] Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation. "菩提心要: 20141227 清流揚善淨人心." Online video clip. *Da Ai TV*. Da Ai TV. Dec. 27, 2014. Web. Accessed May 21, 2017.

practitioners can then more easily access throughout the day. The breaking down of full sermons into ten-minute, five-minute or two-minute snippets that fit neatly into a Facebook news stream is an innovation that follows the trend of mainstream media advertisements that have short two to five minute spots to advertise products or upcoming movies in theaters. Betsy Xiao, a Buddhist adherent in her mid-forties, does not watch television much, but in a lunch gathering with a mutual friend, she told me that she uses her smartphone to follow Master Chin Kung's messages on his Facebook page. Patrick, who shares Master Hai Tao's video clips, also shares links to the video postings of other monastic speakers as well, such as a post sharing a link to a YouTube video called "The Buddha Dharma in Ten Minutes: Episode 208 The Pure Land Dharma Gate vs. The Buddha Dharma of the Five Vehicles"[266] taught by a venerable nun in Hong Kong, Master Fa Ren 法忍.

The above examples represent a next step in the spreading of the Dharma not only by the Buddhist institutions that produce the teachings but by Buddhist adherents who listen to the teachings and share them through electronic means of the Internet. Where once lay Buddhists shared Buddhist teachings by way of collecting or personally copying pamphlets, newsletters, audiotapes, CDs, and DVDS and sharing them through face to face contacts or leaving them at a vegetarian restaurant, they can now simply click a button on a social media web page to share a Buddhist sermon video clip with everyone in their friends list anywhere in the world. It happens as quickly as Ms. Mei Lu sending me the YouTube video link in our online chat to Tsai Li-Hsu's lecture and telling me to "watch this because it's great." And

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[266] Dharma Nature Preaching Hall 法性講堂. "佛法十分鐘 第 208 集 淨土法門 VS 五乘佛法." *YouTube.* Apr. 23, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1-kpQHEcu4. Accessed May 1, 2017.

where many people may feel they have no time to sit through a one hour lecture, sitting through a ten-minute or five-minute video post may seem more bearable to some. This may be one reason Master Fa Ren created a series of videos called "The Buddha Dharma in Ten Minutes," posting the videos onto YouTube and making them accessible through the Buddhist organization website: www.dharma-nature.org.

Although access to Buddhist teachings on the Internet seems to open endless possibilities, language is a limiting factor since Taiwanese Buddhist videos and websites are mostly in Chinese. In a face to face contact, Taiwanese Buddhists working abroad may be able to introduce Buddhism from Taiwan to their neighbors through interpretation or translation, but viewers and listeners at home will still more likely tune in and listen to a Buddhist sermon if they share a language connection with the speaker in the video. Patrick, who lives in Hong Kong and understands Cantonese, watches and shares the video of Master Fa Ren because she speaks Cantonese in her sermon videos. Many of my Taiwanese informants have never heard of Fa Ren since her videos are in Cantonese and she has little or no presence in Taiwan's mass media. However, Fa Ren's YouTube presence has a sizeable viewership comparable to Hai Tao's YouTube viewership. Both monastic speakers have videos posted of their sermons that range in viewership from between 1,000 to 15,000 viewers per video. One example is videos posted by both speakers during one week in July 2016. Episode 159 of Fa Ren's "Buddha Dharma in Ten Minutes," entitled "How to help the deceased escape suffering" was published to YouTube on July 24, 2016 and had over 11,000 views in early May of 2017.[267] Haitao's one and a half hour lecture on the merit of smoke

[267] Dharma Nature Preaching Hall 法性講堂. "佛法十分鐘 第 159 集 如何幫亡者脫苦" *YouTube*. Jul. 24, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKkGhi06eBk&t=2s. Accessed May 11, 2017.

offerings published to YouTube on July 28, 2016 had about 13,000 views as of May 2017.[268] Viewer statistics for these videos are not readily available to general viewers, but a scan of public Facebook profiles that clicked "Like" on these YouTube videos shared within the Facebook social media platform show that most viewers who like and comment on Fa Ren's videos are residents of Hong Kong or live in countries such as Canada and the US, but are from Hong Kong. A small number of viewers also reside in Singapore, Macau, and a few in Taiwan. This suggests that those viewers who tune in to listen to Fa Ren partially do so because they speak Cantonese and want to hear the Buddhist teachings in what they consider to be their native language or dialect.

Mrs. Coco Nguyen, introduced in the last chapter, who is originally from Vietnam, may watch BLTV in Taiwan because she understands Mandarin, but when watching Buddhist sermons on the Internet, she opens videos on YouTube to listen to the sermons of a monk in Vietnam, Thich Phuoc Tien. In my interview with her, spoken in Vietnamese, she talked of one sermon she heard online concerning how past lives and present lives are related:

> I heard the sermon of Master Thich Phuoc Tien. Master Thich Phuoc Tien said one thing that is reasonable. If we want to know about our previous lives and how we lived, then we just look at our life now and we'll know how we lived in our previous lives because the result of now comes from that. And if we want our future life to be better, then we should follow a good life in this life. Master Thich Phuoc Tien said that and I think it's correct because I don't know anything about my past lives. I don't know who I affected or hurt or if I was a robber, but I see why I am suffering so much in this life. And the master said that and I just thought it was so right… I heard this on the Internet. Listen to Master Thich Phuoc Tien. He speaks in our Vietnamese language and lives in a province in Vietnam, but he speaks in an interesting way. You won't be sleepy.[269]

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[268] Venerable Hai Tao Dharma Propagation Recorded Media Special District 海濤法師弘法影音專區. "[E1512-02] 海濤法師 煙供功德" *YouTube.* Jul. 28, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuRZXihgHHw&t=79s. Accessed May 11, 2017.

[269] Interview, September 6, 2014.

As she spoke with me, what I found noteworthy was that she used the phrase "our Vietnamese language" as opposed to simply saying "he spoke in Vietnamese." This created a boundary of inclusion and exclusion. We were both insiders who had access to Thich Phuoc Tien's sermon because he spoke in a language that belonged to us, having roots in Vietnam. Although the video is on YouTube and anyone around the world can access it, only speakers of Vietnamese are included in the boundary of real potential viewers as the videos have no subtitles in other languages. While the videos of Fa Ren and Hai Tao as well as those of Chin Kung and Cheng Yen all have subtitles in Chinese characters and can be understood by Chinese viewers who speak different dialects, there is still a tendency for viewers to choose to listen to speakers who share the same dialect with viewers. This is one reason many Taiwanese Buddhists chose to follow Cheng Yen, who is native Taiwanese and speaks Taiwanese/Hokkien rather than Mandarin in many of her sermons. According to Yu-Shuang Yao:

> [Master Cheng Yen] is a native Hokkien speaker, and in fact she is one of the very few Buddhist masters in Taiwan who use Hokkien to conduct Buddhist teachings. This provides an easier opportunity for the majority population of Taiwan, the Hokkien speakers, to understand Buddhism. In addition, this appeal suggests that Master Cheng Yen has constructed a very accessible and open communication channel with her followers.[270]

Charles Jones cites Jiang Canteng and Lu Huixin to make a similar statement:

> Scholars in Taiwan have offered various explanations to account for her appeal. Jiang points out that she is an extremely eloquent speaker in the Taiwanese (or Hokkien) dialect, which would make her the only national-level Buddhist leader in Taiwan (at least until 1989, when Jingxin became president of the BAROC) to embrace Taiwanese culture... Lu points out that Zhengyan's grassroots support comes almost entirely from the native Taiwanese and Hakka populations, and that

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[270] Yu-Shuang Yao, *Taiwan's Tzu Chi as Engaged Buddhism: Origins, Organization, Appeal and Social Impact* (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2012), 197.

> the success for her association engenders pride in the people's ability to dispense with foreign (particularly American) aid in favor of self-help.[271]

The presentation of Buddhist teachings on television and the Internet from Taiwan is accessible to worldwide audiences, but for the time being, they are attracting mostly Chinese audiences with still limited success in addressing non-Chinese viewers.

Tzu Chi stands at the forefront in having a small number of its television programs, which are accessible on YouTube, be English language programs and include English subtitles for many of Cheng Yen's sermons. And as noted above, Tzu Chi in Indonesia created its own Da Ai TV station spoken in Indonesian for local viewers to understand. However, the language barrier still poses problems. In the episode of "Tzu Chi This Week" mentioned above on Tzu Chi volunteers in Indonesia, Indonesian Tzu Chi volunteers spoke on not understanding everything Cheng Yen said in her "Wisdom at Dawn" program. The program narrator began the segment on overcoming language barriers stating, "Although unfamiliar with the Chinese language, many volunteers say that by listening to the Master closely, they can still absorb the Dharma."[272] The narrator's voice was followed by that of one of the Tzu Chi volunteers, Mr. Lo Hok Lai. According to Mr. Lo, "When I listen closely to the Master, I can understand about fifty to sixty percent of what she says. I think I am very lucky already."[273] This was followed by a statement from Ms. Jia Wenyu, introduced above. On the language barrier Ms. Jia said, "If I decided not to attend the morning Dharma study

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[271] Charles B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 209.

[272] Tzu Chi Da Ai Video 大愛電視. "[Tzu Chi This Week] 20140503." *YouTube.* May 2, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3y73kHH1Zs&t=355s. Accessed May 14, 2017.

[273] Ibid.

group because of the language barrier, then we will be further away from the Master. We won't be able to absorb the Dharma and incorporate its wisdom into our daily lives. Although I don't understand Chinese, I still want to attend the morning session every day."[274] In the case of the Tzu Chi meetings, any lack of understanding of Cheng Yen's teachings in the online videos are usually discussed by the participants in the meeting right after the showing of the video. Speakers will stand and speak to the group on how everyone can apply Master Cheng Yen's teachings to their lives and find examples in their lives of what the master spoke of. So for volunteers like Jia Wenyu, the language barrier can be overcome through the group discussion that follows. The meeting helps to reinforce the group Tzu Chi identity for each participant. Beyond the language barrier, it is Cheng Yen's appeal or charismatic attraction as well as the support of the Tzu Chi organization itself at the local level that attracts non-Chinese individuals to the Chinese Buddhist teachings. Without the extra support of face to face contacts with Chinese Buddhists of an organization to introduce or guide potential supporters, the Internet may allow everyone equal access to Buddhist preachers to propagate the Dharma on YouTube and Facebook, but access to understanding is still limited by language ability and preferences.

V. The Internet as the Sphere of Public Critique

The ability to see sermon segments in short clips rather than full hour length presentations has had an effect in Taiwan that may not have been considered by monastic producers. That is the ability of viewers to judge a short clip outside of its original context and engage in online discussions that catch the attention of the mainstream media population

[274] Ibid.

outside of the normal Buddhist community. This is what happened in 2016 over words spoken by Hai Tao, which were originally given in a sermon to a Chinese Buddhist audience in England. One of the tactics that monastic preachers use to spread Buddhist teachings is to use examples that they are familiar with in contemporary life, sometimes made into jokes, to connect with their audiences. In Hai Tao's talk given in June 2016 at the Shaolin Temple in London, some of the main themes of his talk on how to avoid suffering dealt with trying to understand Buddhist concepts of impermanence, no-self, and the emptiness of any inherent existence in all things. In one example, Hai Tao told the story of Bodhidharma arriving in China, angering the emperor because Bodhidharma said the emperor gained absolutely no merit from his temple building projects. In another example, Hai Tao spoke of how he used to get hit with a stick in his early monastic training by his own master in his process of learning about the concept of no-self. The part of his speech that caused a stir on the Internet throughout Taiwan in 2016 had to do with his example on how wives should deal with extramarital affairs in an eighty-seven second segment posted by an individual onto YouTube[275]:

> If you see something as fake 假的 (*jiade*), then you won't attach to it. It's fake. This evening you are sitting at Shaolin Temple participating in the Dharma Assembly, meditating happily. You transfer the merit to your husband. As a result, you suddenly go home a little early, open the door, and your husband is sleeping with another woman. You must close the door right away and think "It's fake." [At this point, the audience laughs.]
>
> Aiya! The karma of my eyes is so heavy!" [Audience laughter again.] It's fake.
>
> Outside you continue to meditate, "*Amitofuo*." But if you really go through it, then you will be angry. I'd like to ask is that the truth or is it fake?
>
> [The audience answers with 'temporary' and Hai Tao echoes the word 'temporary'.] That woman was his wife in a past life. You invaded their space [Audience laughter].

[275] Linyang Wu, "海濤法師–教您如何面對丈夫外遇" *YouTube*. Jul. 8, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVNkFREcngE. Accessed May 21, 2017.

> Let me ask in your hand, you have a bill of money. Have other people used it? They used it. [The audience answers that other people used it.]
> So, then they can use him and it's fine. [Hai Tao and the audience laugh.]
> Before, there was a woman [who said], "Master, my husband had an affair!"
> I said, "Is there a difference?" [Hai Tao chuckles and the audience laughs slightly.]
> Shared (*gongyong* 共用) [Audience laughter]. Is it different? Otherwise, your money, what do you do with it? You're still not using it accordingly. That is only a feeling. Women, I honestly tell you it's only if you know or not. Is there a man out there who hasn't had an affair? [Hai Tao and the audience laugh.] Of all the men, saying honestly, it's only if you know it or not. So, if you don't know, that's ok. To see it as fake is ok.

What followed from this July 8 YouTube posting in Taiwan was a hotbed of discussion online and in the streets as well as jokes centered on the word "*jiade* (fake)" with YouTube parody videos and satirical music videos created from what Hai Tao had said. The video segment led to open criticism of a male chauvinist point of view, a highlighting of the problem of extramarital affairs in Taiwan, as well as defenders of Hai Tao writing of the video segment being taken out of context by the mainstream media. One news story in the mainstream media coming from EBC news 東森新聞 the day after the YouTube posting interviewed people on the streets as well as Buddhist practitioners associated with Life TV for reactions. The EBC news field reporter showed the Hai Tao video clip on a cell phone to a couple and then asked whether they would be able to respond with "fake" if they caught their spouse cheating. The man said that he could not. The woman responded saying, "The situation already took place. You can't consider it fake."[276] Another woman responded to the reporter saying, "Why would you try to trick yourself? Why would he teach this concept? That's really strange."[277]

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[276] *Dongsen Xinwen* 東森新聞 CH51, "先生外遇當「假的」？ 海濤法師影片又惹議" *YouTube.* Jul. 9, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WS-xAU4uhg. Accessed May 21, 2017.

[277] Ibid.

These interviews were followed by a showing of interviews with Life TV Buddhist practitioners to try to explain the video. An interview with a man in his 50s or 60s identified as a 'believer' *xinzhong* 信眾 was shown in which he gave a Buddhist explanation saying, "Everything is an illusion. The purpose is to say everyone should think positive."[278] The EBC news correspondent then summarized the Life TV position saying Hai Tao meant to make people feel at east and was not encouraging extramarital affairs, but that this incident has led to more people now examining who Hai Tao is online and criticizing his past words and actions.

This criticism has taken the form of comments under mainstream news story sites such as Apple Daily Taiwan *Pingguo Jishi* 蘋果即使[279], YouTube mainstream news postings from EBC, and under the original YouTube posting which had over one thousand comments and almost one million two hundred thousand views ten months after its original posting. The top comment in the original video posting has received almost 450 thumbs up, stating "After watching this video, you must quickly close it. Fake!" Several comments followed a similar tone, making a joke out of Hai Tao's application for the word "fake" or calling the monk himself fake. A number of comments tried to put the video segment into a larger perspective. One commenter wrote:

> Even though I don't like him much… but after watching the entire section of the video I found the fact isn't like what the media reports. The media took it out of context. What came afterwards is the important part. Talking about the destiny of

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[278] Ibid.

[279] *Taiwan Pingguo Ribao* 台灣蘋果日報, "【就是狂】老公外遇? 法師超狂開示 網友傻眼". Jul. 9, 2016, www.appledaily.com.tw/realtimenews/article/new/20160709/904528/. Accessed May 21, 2017.

> married couples, saying it is temporary, that is impermanence. This is the real message. Looking at the tone, the part afterwards "looking at what is not real," actually it's to avoid the present arising of immense anger and regret in one's heart and the creation of an internal intertwined suffering that has no way out. It's adapting one's heart. All in all, people who practice meditation understand it. If an angry, hateful arising heart is too big, there will be no way to pacify it one's whole life. On the contrary, the notion that it is fake, after three or five years, one will always be indifferent (tranquil and calm). The speech of the whole section fundamentally has no problems. Taking it out of context is what is extremely scary.[280]

A second commenter gave his support in one of twenty responses to the above comment:

> I agree with your viewpoint. Taiwan's media takes things out of context. Actually, there are still people who use [Haitao] as the object of laughter in creating their own funny versions to increase the rate of their own exposure. What is most ridiculous is that many people have not seen the complete version and come to their beliefs, endlessly laughing and scolding in their messages. Could it be that people today have lost their ability to think? None of them think it through. None of them seek to verify. Mental capabilities are continually declining.[281]

This kind of discussion does not take place in Buddhist meeting halls or people's homes where Buddhist television is watched because in those situations, the viewers of Buddhist programs are supporters of the programs and of the Buddhist institutions. They would likely try to maintain a Buddhist emphasis on harmony and avoid any form of criticism of others as mentioned in Chapter Three.

Discussion and debate take place on the Internet outside of the protection and support structure of the Buddhist institutions. More specifically they take place between and among people who are both Buddhist and not Buddhist on mainstream social media accounts that are not within the control of the Buddhist institutions. Official videos of Hai Tao's sermons

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[280] Hong Qi Wei, Comment to Linyang Wu, "海濤法師–教您如何面對丈夫外遇" *YouTube*. Jul. 8, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVNkFREcngE. Accessed May 24, 2017.

[281] Jiao Da, Comment to Linyang Wu, "海濤法師–教您如何面對丈夫外遇" *YouTube*. Jul. 8, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVNkFREcngE. Accessed May 24, 2017.

are posted in both Facebook and on YouTube by accounts related to Life TV which usually have comments of praise such as repeated posts of "*Amitofuo*!" from viewers. Criticism in the comments sections of these official accounts is lacking. This is either because critics choose to make criticism outside of those official accounts as someone would not criticize a monk within the monk's temple or because holders of the official accounts have the power to delete critical comments. A position of criticism can easily come from commenters who are not Buddhist since they do not follow the same teachings of Cheng Yen or Hai Tao for avoiding criticism in a disagreement. And when someone copies the original Buddhist video clip and reposts it to his or her own private account, the Buddhist institution has no power to edit or delete critical comments such as the following from one commenter:

> This kind of talk will only mislead people if everyone just takes their spouse's extramarital affair as fake, no matter if everyone has an ostrich mentality. There will be a number of men who become more intense and will break the family harmony and plot to kill their own wife and children to marry the other woman. And everyone will continue to say that is fake. That is really idiotic. Don't say that it's not possible because the tragedy of extramarital affairs doesn't happen just once. It's not something you can just say "it's fake" and have it be resolved. Has Master Hai Tao ever been married? If he's never been married, then what does he understand?[282]

The position that the above commenter takes on Hai Tao's words is a direct reaction against what sounds unreasonable and irrational since it would be unreasonable for a wife not to be angry if she discovers her husband in an affair. That Hai Tao appears to be a Buddhist monk and is a man therefore means he has no experience in being a victim of being cheated on by a husband and means that he has no right to speak of something in which he has no authority. This view does not look on Hai Tao's words as a Buddhist lesson, but only sees his words as being irresponsible and dismissive of married women who suffer from their husbands'

[282] Cateyes Nina, Comment to Linyang Wu, "海濤法師–教您如何面對丈夫外遇" *YouTube*. Jul. 8, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVNkFREcngE. Accessed May 24, 2017.

affairs. This same opinion was shared by a few of my female informants who were not Buddhist and did not regularly follow Hai Tao's sermons. It is a reaction the commenter takes of a limited video clip that she sees online and a reaction that she feels comfortable in openly sharing on a YouTube comment space. The video comment section allows for all people to openly express their opinions and have their voices be heard in support of or against a monastic speaker who usually would not be confronted in either a temple situation or in a situation that is full of Buddhist adherents who look up to the monastic speaker. If she had sat through the actual full sermon at the Shaolin Temple, she may not have felt so free in openly expressing her opinion and at the same time, if she heard and understood the full sermon, she might have had a different opinion.

Of the twenty-one replies that were in response to this last commenter, an early reply tried to explain Hai Tao's position saying that Hai Tao had been married and had children before becoming a monk and that concepts in the Dharma are complex, but karma does play a role. She answered this Buddhist explanation with the following response:

> If he has been married before, he should understand how irresponsible his words are. Even if you count an extramarital affair as brought about by karma, you still shouldn't completely just let it go. I know that he wants people who encounter cases of extramarital affairs to let it go, but to take an actuality and say that it is fake makes people feel they want to escape reality. What is a shared husband? You have to know the action of extramarital affairs is a crime, an evil, it's illegal. It can be reported to the police to catch the adulterers in the act. Master, please. If you want to give an explanation, please don't use this example.[283]

The discussion or debate that takes place here in the comment section is one that allows for normal people outside of the Buddhist order to openly voice their opinions, but these opinions would not have been formed if someone had not taken the original video clip from the Internet space of the Buddhist community, a space that non-Buddhists have no

interest in, and put it into a space of the mainstream media, igniting a fiery discussion and leading to criticism of a monk and his Buddhist organization.

Hai Tao's main point was to speak of the illusory nature of existence and the suffering that comes from attachment to things that are impermanent. All things lack an inherent or an intrinsic existence and are, instead, only temporary manifestations based on a Buddhist principle of dependent origination. Because phenomena have no permanent exist, they can be described as unreal or fake as Hai Tao puts it. In the rapport he had with his live audience, the example of extramarital affairs as an example of phenomena being unreal or fake seemed to be a moment of levity for those who understood his Buddhist lesson. However, when this example was taken out of the context of the Buddhist lesson on life being illusory and put into an outside individual's YouTube video account in the public domain, it caused a backlash in comments like the one above from people who do not see their spouses as illusions or impermanent or "fake". People who were critical of Hai Tao felt that he had made a mistake in using such an example.

The use of the Internet and of YouTube, specifically, to attack a Buddhist institution has previously been studied by Fukamizu Kenshin, who studied the Internet presence *of Jōdo Shinshu* Buddhism in Japan. According to Fukamizu's study, the Honganji Sect of *Jōdo Shinshu* Buddhism had long had opponents or rival religious groups, such as one group called Shinrankai that wanted to criticize the Honganji establishment to put forward its own views on *Jōdo Shinshu* Buddhism and its founder Shinran (1173-1263 CE). YouTube was one battleground in which the Shinrankai group could attack Honganji:

> The [Honganji] sect cannot eliminate these attacks because of the ways in which the 'open democracy' of the Internet offers people immense freedom to post what they wish online, and because of the ways in which information on the Internet

[283] Ibid.

> is administered and processed through search engines… If one searches sites such as YouTube Japan with a tag such as "*Jōdo Shinshu* 浄土真宗", one comes across a number of animation videos among the top results, including those uploaded by 'tulipk' (*online*), which contains high quality videos showing the story of Shinran's life… These videos have had an average of 8,000 hits and contain Shin Buddhism terms, which causes them to be identified under a search about Shin Buddhism. However, they contain specific expressions and terminology that originate from the doctrines of Shinrankai which suggests these are in fact Shinrankai related videos rather than Honganji ones…
>
> As such, this is an area in which clearly traditional authority structures as represented by official religious sects such as Honganji are being undermined and a new order based on popularity (and which implicitly may be seeking to weaken traditional authority structures) is emerging. In these online contexts we can see how a traditional sect such as Honganji may be losing its capacity to monopolize how information is presented about itself.[284]

What Fukamizu says of the Honganji sect of *Jōdo Shinshu* can also be said of Buddhist organizations in Taiwan where, as the above YouTube video of Hai Tao demonstrates, critics can post videos that can have a wider viewing audience than official videos posted by the Buddhist organization. Moreover, discussion and criticism related to the organization or leader can take place beyond the protected space of temple grounds or even Buddhist organizational websites and social media accounts.

This public space for debate brought about by the Internet somewhat resembles what Charles Hirschkind described with audiocassettes in giving Egyptian Muslims a free space to debate and critique Muslim leaders. One example Hirschkind used was his experience in sitting in a shared taxicab in which the bearded driver and his two passengers, a young woman and a teenage boy, ended up debating different interpretations of the Quran after the end of listening to a sermon tape in the taxi. The boy wanted to listen to music next while

[284] Fukamizu Kenshin, "The Situation of Japanese Traditional Buddhism in the Web 2.0 Era: Who Attacks and Who Guards the Religion?" in Erica Baffelli, Ian Reader, and Birgit Staemmler, eds. *Japanese Religions on the Internet: Innovation, Representation and Authority* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 49-50.

the two adults said listening to music went against the teachings in the Quran. After describing the discussion that took place, Hirschkind contextualized the conversation around his position on Islamic audiocassettes and the public sphere:

> This conversation reveals a number of characteristics of a kind of public deliberation that has become increasingly prevalent in Egypt in recent decades. Note, to begin with, the rather unstructured and informal character of this exchange. Situated outside the boundaries of prescribed ritual practice or scholarly instruction, this form of discussion cuts across generational and gender lines in ways not possible within the traditional institutions of Islamic authority. The relationship between the speakers is not that of teacher to pupil, nor of social superior to social subordinate, but rather of coparticipants in a common moral project, their speech structured around and orientation toward correct Islamic practice.[285]

What the YouTube comments about Hai Tao share with Hirschkind's taxicab is a freedom to discuss the content spoken by a religious leader outside of the bounds of the religious institution. There is no hierarchy of authority and the participants are all equal in being netizens discussing a common topic. What is different from Hirschkind's taxicab is that not all participants share the same religion or have the same religious knowledge base in the Taiwanese YouTube case. The arguments on YouTube between Buddhist and non-Buddhist Taiwanese take place because non-Buddhist viewers see Hai Tao's message in a specific context concerning a serious problem of extramarital relationships. His answer to consider the problem as "fake" is unrealistic and even harmful. The Buddhist viewers see Hai Tao's message in the context of a Buddhist teaching in which bringing up an extramarital situation is merely an example of the unreal nature of all phenomena.

The Mainstream Media Adopts Buddhist Segments for Entertainment

The arising of the hot topic of extramarital affairs was not limited to Hai Tao's words as the mainstream media then dug up the words of another monk, Hui Lu 慧律, who spoke

[285] Hirschkind, 109-110.

on the same topic one year earlier in an assembly in Hong Kong. Hui Lu, who often speaks on Buddha Compassion TV (BTS), gave his own sermon in which he discussed solutions to an extramarital affair in 2015. About one month after Hai Tao and the "fake" discussion started, one individual posted Hui Lu's sermon onto YouTube. Mainstream news sources including TTV news 台視新聞, CTI 中天新聞, and Apple Daily Taiwan took up the video and created a story centered around Hui Lu as competition to Hai Tao. The Apple Daily Newspaper in Taiwan took snippets of Hui Lu's video sermon to create a comparison with Hai Tao's solution with the headline "Illicit Sexual Relations with the Other Woman! In the World of Monks Only Hui Lu Can Surpass Hai Tao." Apple Daily's short video began with describing the predicament of what to do when confronted with an affair. The question was followed by showing a clip from the Hai Tao video in which Hai Tao told his audience to consider it "fake." The news story narrator then said there was another master who would not be outdone, introducing Hui Lu, the founder of the Kaohsiung Wenshu Dharma Hall Academy who had spoken on the same topic the previous year. The clip showed Hui Lu speaking about a woman who had come to him saying her husband was having an affair. Hui Lu answered:

> There are houses put out for rent. Cars are also put out for rent. Temporarily put your husband out for rent. [Audience laughter] Your husband isn't returning? No problem. Out for rent! [More Audience laughter][286]

The news story narrator followed this with bringing up the topic of wives wanting to commit suicide, then showing a clip of how Hui Lu responded to the woman in his story:

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[286] www.appledaily.com.tw Limited. "小三之亂！法師界只有慧律能超越海濤" Online video clip. Aug. 10, 2016. www.appledaily.com.tw/realtimenews/article/new/20160810/925707/. Accessed May 24, 2017.

> If you die, aren't you just making it easier for the other woman? If you are dead, then there is completely no hope. If you stay, then there still is [hope]. And all the property is still yours…[287]

The narrator cuts in to say that after the Hui Lu video had been uploaded for a week, the viewership of the video had surpassed 580,000 views with many commenters praising Hui Lu's humor, putting him in the same league as Hai Tao. The narrator ends the segment saying the master advises women that they do not need to stick with an unworthy man.

However, in the actual video of Hui Lu speaking, he ends that segment of his sermon with a Buddhist message of possession not being beneficial and that what we should possess is the wisdom of the truth of life. Both Hui Lu and Hai Tao teach that life is impermanent and illusory. There is no self and no actual "I" for any individual. When people continue to only see their own points of view, maintaining selfish desires and attaching to things and people, then they suffer when the things and people that they attach to do not conform to their ideals. The Buddhist goal is for people to think and act with a selfless compassion for others. In the hypothetical situation of the extramarital affair, if the wife could let go of her notion of self – the attachment to her personal identity, desires and expectations of life, and if she were to understand that she and the world around her (including her husband and his lover) are only forms of a conventional existence that do not permanently or really exist, then theoretically, she would not feel suffering because she would not have an attachment to her husband in a selfish manner or expect her happiness to be dependent upon her ideals of how he should behave. She would know that any pleasant or unpleasant occurrences related to the material world are only temporary and illusory. According to Hui Lu, "If you can

[287] Ibid.

accept an unpleasant fact, then there is no matter under heaven and earth to feel hopelessly worried over."[288]

These teachings of no-self and impermanence and the joking examples that the monks use with the teachings are the things that are not understood by a non-Buddhist viewing audience that sees the world as real and sees their problems in life as real problems. In a material and possessive culture where people make clear distinctions of ownership and belonging and think of their own emotions and feelings above those of others, accepting the idea that nothing is real seems to be an impossible task. The message ends up sounding like a preposterous joke which can then be used by the mainstream media as such. In taking the video of Hui Lu out of context and removing any Buddhist message, Apple Daily as a mainstream media source, created a story of entertainment for its audience. Hui Lu gained an exposure to the mainstream viewing population, but his message was distorted, since only his joking was used for entertainment.

A History of Male-Centeredness

Using extramarital affairs as a joking example may suggest that contemporary Chinese monks still hold sexist or patriarchal assumptions of gender roles from the past that keeps them from connecting with members of the general population in the present. The history of sexism within the early Buddhist sangha has been examined by Sandra Wawrytko who writes that "Buddhist women have distinguished themselves in their practice down through the centuries. However, their achievements were not always recognized as such, their evaluation being subject to the vagaries of hostile misogynist and gynophobic

[288] Ibid.

conditions."[289] In describing how these conditions were present in Chinese Buddhist history, Wawrytko refers to the work of Miriam Levering, who stated:

> Chinese Buddhism remained shaped by men as the primary participants, by their imagination and their language. It never allowed women's experience and language to have anything like an equal influence on its expressive forms. Thus, it never could become "androgynous"—a religion in which the imaginations and experiences of men *and* women, which might be expected to differ, could both enrich the tradition.[290]

Levering comes to this conclusion after examining the sermon of the Song dynasty Chan monk, Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163 C.E.). In Dahui's sermon, he attempts to praise a woman for her deeds with the intent of showing that gender distinctions are unimportant. However, he describes the woman as a *da zhang fu* 大丈夫, which was to mean 'great hero', but it is a word which has a very masculine connotation of a manly man. Levering writes:

> The rhetoric of equality cannot stand up against the rhetoric of masculine heroism, when the latter is supported by gender distinctions so "real" to the culture and remain unambiguous. In this sermon [Dahui] says, "You see her as a woman, but she is a [*da zhang fu*], a great hero." This is as unambiguous a statement of equality as this rhetoric can yield. But it is not so different from the formulation several times repeated elsewhere in [Dahui's] records, "Even though you are a woman, you have the will of a [*da zhang fu*]," a formulation that shows the androcentric character of Chinese Buddhism in general and of Ch'an in particular.[291]

While Dahui had the intention of praising a female Buddhist practitioner, the words he used were colored by the male-dominated society that he lived in, giving his comments a

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[289] Sandra Wawrytkyo, "Sexism in the Early *Sangha*: Its Social Basis and Philosophical Dis-solution" in Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Sandra Wawrytko, eds., *Buddhist Behavioral Codes and the Modern World: An International Symposium* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 286-287.

[290] Ibid., 289.

[291] Miriam Levering, "Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism" in José Cabezón ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 151.

particularly male viewpoint. The same is the case for the contemporary Taiwanese monk, Hai Tao who tried to make an example for a Buddhist teaching, but ended up doing so from a male viewpoint which sees that women who encounter their husband's affair must somehow deal with that situation.

The hypothetical situation of a man encountering his wife's affair is never brought up as an example. This is the kind of response being brought up to Hai Tao's words in the contemporary era by people like Huang Sue-ying 黃淑英, executive director of Taiwan Women's Link, an advocacy organization for women's rights, who see the problem as a gender and feminist issue. She spoke about Hai Tao's video on television in an interview with Next TV news 臺電視.[292] Her public response came about because of the adoption of Hai Tao's video by mainstream news sources. The news video was then uploaded to YouTube where it became the stage for further discussion and debate by Internet viewers.

Mainstream news sources used the sermon clips dealing with extramarital affairs from Hai Tao and Hui Lu because the content of their words was unusual and the tone of their speech gave a sense of levity that could be made into an entertainment story or a story worth discussion. Their unorthodox answers were particularly male answers to a female problem that could lead to audience reactions prompting laughter or criticism that would draw viewing audiences towards the news story.

These same mainstream news sources did not touch on how the nun Cheng Yen had answered the question in the past, possibly because the way in which Da Ai TV and Tzu Chi's media handled this problem lacked any levity that could be used for entertainment. On

[292] *Zheng yi ge* 正義哥 Taiwan, "海濤法師驚語「外遇假的」 XX 痛批：不倫不類!" *Youtube.* Jul. 15, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JF0sYIpjV-0&t=1s. Accessed Jun. 11, 2017.

an episode of "*Hui mou lai shi lu*" 回眸來時路 or "Tzu Chi's Humble Beginnings," Venerable Te-Hsuan 德宣, one of the nuns of the Tzu Chi Abode, recalls the meetings Master Cheng Yen would have with female Tzu Chi volunteers who came to ask how to solve their problems at home:

> If she said that her husband was having an affair, *Shangren* would say, "Within ten feet, he is your husband. Outside of ten feet he is not important to you (一丈之內是丈夫，一丈之外就馬馬虎虎)." If your husband already has an affair, what can you do? *Shangren* would say, "If you love your husband, then you must love the person he loves."[293]

This message of 'love the person your husband loves' in cases of extramarital affairs is one that has been repeated in different forms of Tzu Chi media, including Da Ai TV programs, Tzu Chi magazines and Cheng Yen's book *Still Thoughts* in which she answers the question of affairs in several ways. In one answer, she says:

> You should love the one your husband loves. Try to change your common love into a bodhisattva's pure love. Religious faith is more than only taking part in religious rituals. You must understand the Earth Treasury Bodhisattva's great spirit of compassion, instead of only chanting his name all the time…[294]

In answering another volunteer on how to cope with the pain of an affair, she replies:

> Don't call it an affair. You should view it as fate. It is part of your karma. You should accept it bravely. You should keep loving and thanking your husband. He has given you a chance to see that our lives are filled with changes. You can grasp this chance to examine your conscience and readjust yourself. Do not see it as a form of pain. It is a sin if you commit suicide, since you destroy the body given to you by your beloved parents. How can you eliminate your bad karma if you do not have a body to do good deeds? Both husband and wife should feel grateful if their marriage is

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[293] Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, "*Hui mou lai shi lu*" 回眸來時路 Online video clip. *Facebook*. Facebook, Oct. 5, 2016. Web. Accessed Jun. 11, 2017.

[294] Shih Cheng Yen, *Still Thoughts: Volume Two,* trans. Liu King-pong (Taipei: Tzu Chi Cultural Publishing Co., 1996), 172.

> pleasant. They should remain calm if their marriage is not as wonderful as they expected.[295]

From a non-Buddhist perspective, Cheng Yen's response of 'love the person your husband loves' may be just as unusual as Hai Tao's response, but it comes from the Buddhist teaching to have compassion for all beings. The tone in which she answers these volunteers is a serious tone meant to help the women who are suffering. Because of the serious tone, mainstream media sources would be unable to adopt such answers and use them for entertainment in the way that they could for the videos of Hai Tao and Hui Lu. Her answers stay within the bounds and the control of the Tzu Chi mediatic world. This means no one outside of Tzu Chi is criticizing her position on YouTube but also that not many outside of Tzu Chi's mediatic influence hear her position on the matter unless they tune in to her sermons or the Da Ai TV dramas that also deal with affairs.

When the mainstream media uses the monks' videos, they expose the monks and their sermons to a wide viewing public that would not usually watch Buddhist sermons. Buddhist monks might see this as a benefit in that they can introduce Buddhist teachings to more people. This same benefit can potentially become a detriment when the monastic videos are reused and reposted by mainstream media sources taking video clips out of their original context and opening them to debate and discussion by the wider viewing audience.

VI. Conclusion

The Internet allows for global access to the contents of Taiwanese Buddhist television on the websites of the Buddhist television organizations – Da Ai TV, Life TV, BLTV, Hwazan TV, and Buddha Compassion TV, and on social media platforms through

[295] Ibid., 173.

which the Buddhist institutions and their members participate in. The presence and accessibility of these streaming broadcasts on the Internet as well as through satellite television gives international audiences a television alternative that is not available in most countries and allows viewers the opportunity to form an identity, not rooted in a national consumerism based on the country of residence, but based on Buddhist principles related to compassion and charity that the Taiwanese Buddhist preachers teach about in their broadcasts. When viewers choose to listen to these broadcasts and apply the lessons learned to their lives, they are choosing to resist the mainstream media that attempt to influence viewers into a consumer identity. The strategy of breaking televised sermons into shorter video clips and posting both short clips and full sermons onto social media video sites like YouTube and Facebook has allowed listeners to easily access the content and listen to or watch the Buddhist teachings any time of day to remind Buddhist adherents to be mindful in their thoughts and actions throughout the day and to reinforce or encourage listeners on the positive actions that they are already partaking in.

Ironically, the same video clips that are used to help Buddhist adherents resist mainstream consumer culture can also be used by the producers of mainstream culture to create news stories if the content is controversial. This is both a curse and a blessing for the Buddhist speakers or organizations involved. On the one hand, they become open to criticism by members of the mainstream public on the Internet who see only small segments of videos and may misunderstand the meaning, causing them to have a negative view of the monastic speaker and perhaps even of Buddhism in general. On the other hand, the videos and the criticism leads to discussion about monks and about Buddhism with Buddhist defenders being given a chance on the open forum of the Internet to introduce or explain Buddhist principles to a non-Buddhist audience. This opens paths of dialogue between

Buddhists and non-Buddhists in ways that were not available before Internet social media. Problems in society such as extramarital affairs that may not have been discussed in public forums before have the chance to become the center of attention as people who suffer from the encounters are introduced to different possibilities of dealing with the situation. Hai Tao and Hui Lu may have had the fortune or misfortune to be highlighted in mainstream news for their positions, but other monastic leaders like Cheng Yen have also spoken on different solutions to extramarital affairs. Her answers are searchable through the Internet but have not been highlighted by mainstream news sources. The move of Taiwanese Buddhist television programs and videos to the Internet has created both opportunities for Buddhist producers and practitioners as well as new challenges that are only beginning to be explored.

Conclusion

In my examination of Buddhist television in Taiwan, I have shown that in the process of adopting television, Buddhist institutions adapted the medium by following historical precedents and Buddhist teachings in removing elements that did not conform to Buddhist values and adding Buddhist elements to propagate the Dharma and influence viewers towards a moral life. The convenience of the television broadcast within Taiwan and abroad allows for Buddhist adherents far from preachers to listen to and watch their favorite preachers at any time from home or in a Buddhist community center in which they can discuss the masters' teachings with fellow Buddhists. With television broadcasting religious ceremonies, the purpose of television and televisual devices also changes from being a device for entertainment based in commercial profit to being a tool for ritual practice. As a ritual tool that broadcasts sermons, morning and evening rituals, as well as special yearly rituals to homes around Taiwan at the same time, television has the potential to unify Buddhist adherents into an imagined Buddhist community that shares in the same goals of rejecting materialistic desires and building a heart of compassion to help those in need and to end personal suffering. And when the television broadcasts are posted onto Internet streaming sites like YouTube, they allow for non-Buddhist viewers to enter online discussions, questioning the teachings of monastic preachers in a way that would not have been possible in a traditional temple setting or through a sermon broadcast on television. Through the unexpected reactions and dialogues that form from these online comments, Buddhist producers together with Buddhist communities have a chance to enter into a public discourse that can either validate the use of Internet streaming of televised sermon segments or suggest that new boundaries should be set on what gets shared with the public so there are

fewer misunderstandings. This public discourse for the Buddhist community is the fourth and final step in Heidi Campbell's framework for the religious social-shaping of technology – a framework that I have attempted to use in examining Buddhist television in Taiwan from the beginning of the first chapter to make sense of how and why Buddhists institutions could adopt television.

Following the first step in the religious social-shaping of technology framework in Chapter One, I showed the pre-modern precedents for Chinese Buddhists adopting forms of popular culture to transmit teachings of Buddhism. Buddhists adopted established methods of storytelling in strange tales and accounts of filial sons to create Buddhist miracle tales that followed the same format as the earlier story genres with the goal that the audience of these stories would then take the stories to heart and believe in the power of Buddhist deity figures like the bodhisattva Guanyin. Audiences would also believe in the power of Buddhist sutras like the *Lotus Sutra*. The importance of using established means of storytelling through handwritten stories or woodblock printed and later moveable type printed material was in the need for audiences to accept something that they already were familiar with, the format of strange tales and accounts of filial sons, to accept something unfamiliar, the Buddhist teachings. The acceptance of these teachings through the medium of popular story genres would then influence a person's faith and actions in valuing Buddhist teachings and praying to Buddhist deities. It is this strategy of using established mediums of propagating stories or teachings that has continued into the present-day usage of television dramas, animated movies, and news programs.

This early adoption strategy evident in the Han dynasty continued throughout Chinese history when Buddhists actively tried to propagate the Dharma through popular media that might be accepted by mass audiences. We see this adoption strategy again twelve

hundred years later during the Ming dynasty when the monk Zhuhong adopted the use of morality books or *shanshu* to spread Buddhist beliefs. Morality books were a form of popularly printed media that were originally used to spread Daoist teachings on how to morally behave in daily life. Zhuhong adapted this format by removing the Daoist elements and inserting Buddhist ones so that readers would be following Buddhist prescriptions on daily behavior instead. As with the Buddhist miracle tales the Buddhist version of morality books were created to influence the thoughts and actions of readers towards a more pious disposition in daily life based on Buddhist teachings.

Five hundred years later, in the present era, Buddhist institutions follow this precedent by adopting the use of popular television formats, replacing disagreeable television elements such as violence and materialistic desires with elements that are aligned with Buddhist doctrine. In this way, the practice of adopting a popular medium of communication or medium of message propagation is nothing new for Buddhist institutions in that they have been adopting new media for centuries.

In keeping with the framework of the religious social-shaping of technology, I also examined Mahayana Buddhist doctrine through passages of the *Lotus Sutra* to show how Buddhists might have interpreted the doctrine in a way that accepts modern technology but limits how the technology is used so that such usage does not conflict with the Buddhist teachings. The Mahayana Buddhist concept of 'expedient means' (Ch. *fangbian* 方便) can be interpreted to allow for Buddhists to use whatever means necessary to preach based on the appropriate level of understanding of the audience. Chapter Two showed that this use of expedient means can include using television dramas and cartoons if these forms of entertainment are what audiences are attracted to. In her recent work, Stefania Travagnin has argued that the use of Buddhist cartoons and documentaries is a way to legitimate a certain

history in which specific monastic leaders in recent history serve as ideal Buddhist figures, turning biographies into hagiographies.[296] This practice would be in keeping with the precedent of Buddhists creating hagiographies in the premodern eras through Buddhist miracle tales and biographies of eminent monks. As an expedient means, these storytelling methods and use of modern movie techniques continue to be for attracting audiences towards Buddhism and influencing these audiences towards pious and moral behavior in their daily lives. Dramas and cartoons are expedient means that share air time with traditional Buddhist sermon preaching as monks and nuns on the six Buddhist stations in Taiwan use a variety of methods to spread the Dharma.

Based on how monks and nuns interpret Buddhist doctrines, television practices can also be limited as in the case of the monk Hai Tao on Life TV choosing not to use commercial advertising as he follows the Buddhist teachings that go against the buying and selling of Buddhist images, which he interprets to mean the use of commercial advertisements to pay for the cost of running Buddhist television and make a profit. This goal of trying to stay free from outside commercials is shared by all six Buddhist stations in Taiwan as these stations obtain funding through member donations to remain in complete control of what they broadcast and to be free from the influence of profit-making corporations. In a world where corporate influence can be seen everywhere from politics and public policy to leisure and entertainment, having the ability to stay free of this influence and propagate a Buddhist message that goes against desires, profit, and materialism is extremely important for these Taiwanese Buddhist organizations.

Viewers who tune into the Buddhist channels are tuning in exactly because they are searching for an alternative to commercial television and seeking something more than just

[296] Travagnin, 227, 237.

entertainment. In Chapter Three, I argued that the watching of Buddhist television served as a liminal space for some viewers as they listened intently to the messages of certain monastic preachers like Chin Kung and Hai Tao to guide the viewers in their daily lives. The act of television watching in this sense was a liminal space because the viewers consciously set aside a time and space to listen to teachings with a hope that it would help them move beyond their daily thinking of commerce and making ends meet and towards a mindset of selfless compassion to help others in need.

When sermon programs are watched in groups of Buddhist adherents, the result is not a public sphere of critique against the speaker because the adherents all share in the Buddhist values of maintaining a harmonious society and avoiding words that could be considered abusive speech or slander. Borrowing Charles Hirschkind's notion of a counterpublic, I identify these community viewings as a Buddhist counterpublic mediated space in which the community members discuss the teachings on how to live moral and ethical lives based on the Dharma preached in the televised sermons without critique of the speaker or the speaker's message. As shown in the case of Tzu Chi communities, rather than serving to create critical public spheres, the mediation of Buddhist sermons through television and televisual equipment serves to create a greater number of communities within and beyond Taiwan that are more unified in their agreement with the teachings of Cheng Yen as the leader. The viewers feel a closeness to Cheng Yen even from a great distance. This may be because of what Julia Huang identifies as Cheng Yen's charisma or it may be because of what Yunfeng Lu, Byron Johnson, and Rodney Stark have identified in modern Taiwanese Buddhist organizations as being more systematically organized and having

stronger congregations than in the past.[297] In either case, the existence of the televisual technology to broadcast monastic leaders like Cheng Yen into people's living rooms and across the world by satellite and Internet does make Buddhist practitioners feel closer to Cheng Yen than simply reading her words in a book.

Against what Walter Benjamin has written concerning the aura of a live speaker and mechanical reproduction, the religious and ritual function of a monastic speaker is not lost as the image is reproduced across thousands of televisual screens. On the contrary, this reproduction of the religious through televisual images has the potential to create sacred spaces within peoples' living rooms and this was demonstrated in Chapter Four. From Buddhist adherents sitting in a respectful meditative posture while watching a televised Buddhist sermon to ritual practitioners actively chanting in their morning and evening rituals in unison with a televised ritual broadcast, Buddhist television shows that it is more than just a device for watching commercial entertainment programs. Through religious Buddhist broadcasts, television becomes a ritual tool that transforms the living room into a sacred space and directs the bodily comportment of individuals into pious activity. When hundreds or thousands of practitioners watch and pray with the ritual broadcast at the same time, this creates a virtual community of Buddhists who are praying in unison. This virtual community that prays in unison with a ritual event that is televised creates an act of praying with one heart or one mind (Ch. *yixin* 一心), a concept in Mahayana Buddhism that unites all beings in a sense of totality, moving them beyond notions of individuality and distinctions. This concept of praying in unison to unite as one mind is one that monastic speakers may have described in the past, but the concept reaches a whole new level when thousands of

[297] Huang, 267-273. See also Lu, Johnson, and Stark, 144.

television viewers in different locations can pray together at the same time with a television broadcast.

Beyond the acts of watching televised sermons and praying with ritual broadcasts, Buddhist television viewers can also use the television watching experience to identify themselves in a way that is different from the identity of a consumer watching commercial television and this was discussed in Chapter Five. Where the producers of commercial television seek to identify television viewers only as potential consumers from which to earn a profit, the viewers of Buddhist television are identifying themselves with the transnational nonprofit organizations that broadcast the Buddhist channels. Citizens in Indonesia and Malaysia are differentiated by national boundaries but those who are members of their local Tzu Chi communities within each country share in the watching of Cheng Yen on Da Ai TV and share in a common identity of being a Tzu Chi volunteer that goes beyond nation. This Tzu Chi identity possibly even goes beyond religion as some Tzu Chi members are also Muslim or Christian but share in Tzu Chi's goal to spread compassion to all beings through Tzu Chi's worldwide relief work.

The means of access to Buddhist television is not limited by national boundaries as the age of satellite networks and Internet streaming has allowed for Buddhist television programs and program segments to be viewable worldwide. And unlike commercial television programs that are limited to national boundaries or international corporate agreements based on profit sharing motives, the Buddhist programs from Da Ai TV, Life TV, BLTV, Hwazan TV, and UCTV are openly accessible on the Internet and even shared as video clips in contemporary social media websites such as Facebook and YouTube.
The problem with this availability is that when video segments are shared in the public space of social media, they can be taken out of context or misinterpreted by non-Buddhist

audiences as Hai Tao's words were in 2016, leading to discussion in the mainstream media and online social media over Hai Tao's position on extramarital affairs and relations between men and women. It is this moment of public discourse that serves as a point of decision-making for the Buddhist community that also can be identified with Heidi Campbell's fourth step in the religious social-shaping of technology framework. In the fourth step of the framework, questions and choices are posed to consider whether changes need to be made in the usage of a technology because of its influence on the social sphere of the community. When non-Buddhists enter dialogue with Buddhists over controversial topics, does this serve as a validation that video segments posted in social media are successful in attracting the attention of audiences who would not otherwise listen to Buddhist sermons? Or is this form of attention an unwanted kind of attention because of misunderstanding? Should the Buddhist community instead limit what sermons or teachings are made public if the public does not "get the joke" because they lack the understanding of the Buddhist context? Or is this a case in which some monastic speakers are out of touch with contemporary society and need to better understand the position and feelings of their potential audiences to better connect with audiences?

The answers to the above questions are still up for debate, but one topic that is relevant to these questions is the power to control how a speaker's words are presented and the power to critique or comment on those words. As Fukamizu Kenshin has written, it becomes a question of a religious organization's "capacity to monopolize how information is presented about itself."[298] In the case of Hai Tao and the Life TV Facebook page that shares Hai Tao's videos, the video of the sermon segment with the controversial joke was either

[298] Fukamizu, 50.

taken down or was not posted on Facebook, leaving no room for discussion on the matter. The position of one follower of Hai Tao that I spoke with was that no discussion or follow-up explanation was necessary since anyone who understood his teaching on impermanence would have understood the joke. And those who did not understand would still not change their minds about Hai Tao even if the context was explained to them. While it is the goal of Buddhist preachers to teach about Buddhism in a way that helps alleviate people's suffering, this controversy suggests that not all monastic speakers will be successful in attracting all listeners. Each potentially new audience member develops an affinity for speakers based on the content of a speaker's words, their demeanor, or their charisma. This charisma might be translated as an ability to speak with clarity and to effectively get their point understood across different mediums to different people. And with the need for monks to develop charismatic speaking personas, we come back full circle to statements first made in the introduction about the media changing the way preachers preach to better access new viewing audiences through television as well as through Internet social media.

Whatever changes are made to the means of propagation whether by radio, television, or Internet streaming, the Buddhist message in Taiwan of avoiding desires and generating compassion remains consistent. At the time of writing this conclusion, my friend Patrick shared another video from Hai Tao onto my Facebook newsfeed. The video segment was from a Buddhist assembly Hai Tao was attending in Chiang Mai, Thailand on August 2, 2017. The video was posted to the Hai Tao Facebook page on August 12 and by August 15 had already received over 21,000 views. In the video, a young man standing in the audience asked Hai Tao if he knew of any methods to deal with clinging passions. Part of Hai Tao's response was to say:

> When it comes to desires the Buddha says desires are generated from intentions; intentions are generated from thoughts. That means you can't think it and you must not watch it. Don't watch adult films that provoke the thought on purpose. Once you trigger the thought, you can't control the desires… To deal with feelings, we can nurture compassion and contemplate emptiness. This is to say, you have to keep intentionally cultivating the practices… [299]

Hao Tao's message conveyed by a social media post on Facebook through an Internet video stream is the same message that he delivers on television and on freely distributed DVDs and CDs and through freely distributed printed books. This is the same message that other Buddhist preachers continue to convey as well – cultivate compassion for all living beings. This Buddhist message stays consistent, but the way that it is conveyed continually changes as society continues to develop new means of mass media.

The irony is that each medium that comes about is a medium that conveys a form of entertainment, from storytelling genres and plays to music and movies. And in each case, Buddhism adopts the new form of mass media or new genre of popular culture to influence people away from their personal desires in entertainment and towards a life of exhibiting selfless compassion. It is an ongoing relationship of opposites since Buddhism itself would not exist if people had no desires. And those who cultivate compassion by following the teachings of these Buddhist preachers are continually cultivating the practices of using these media forms to remind themselves of the path of practice in daily life. From reading printed Buddhist miracle tales, to listening to Buddhist sermons on the radio and television, to watching small video clips of sermons on Internet social media, the act of receiving the information is the act of cultivation itself.

[299] Hai Tao speaking in Chiang Mai, Thailand, August 2, 2017. Posted to the Facebook Page "Ven. Hai Tao" on Aug. 12, 2017. Accessed Aug. 15, 2017.

In writing about the Buddhist media culture of 1930s Shanghai, Francesca Tarocco described the Buddhist community there as 'doing' Buddhism when the monastic and lay community worked together to produce new imagery through magazines, comic art, photography and modern publications, and by founding new temples. The community was also 'doing' Buddhism when they operated one of the first Buddhist radio stations in the world in 1934 called Buddha's Voice (*Foyin diantai* 佛音電台) and created Buddhist vinyl records.[300] To this list of activities in modern Chinese Buddhism, I would add television as also 'doing' Buddhism. This 'doing' of Buddhism as used by Tarocco focuses on the production and consumption of material objects to accumulate and transfer merit through acts of donation. She writes, "In the Chinese digital age, with its unprecedented amounts of economic power at the individual level, choices in Buddhist religious consumption will grow all the more important and could even transform how the religious and the sacred are experienced."[301]

I would argue that with television, this transformation has already begun and that 'doing' Buddhism for the laity is the cultivation of compassion through the very act of television watching itself. The practice of listening to the teachings on television and the Internet and taking them to heart is also the practice of Buddhism. It is a practice that continually changes with the changing media culture and technology. Before the invention of sound recording, there was no way for repetitive sound to be a part of a ritually created environment other than to have people physically perform chants and use ritual instruments. From the twentieth century into the present, mechanically reproduced sound has played an important part in creating a sacred space of ritual chanting, singing, and instruments via

[300] Tarocco, 637.

radio, record, audiocassette, CD, MP3, and now repetitive YouTube videos of Buddhist chants and songs. With the television and the Internet there is now also a visual element added to newly created sacred spaces. Whatever mediums may be created in the future, perhaps three-dimensional holographic projections for the home, Buddhists will likely adapt such media for Buddhist propagating and ritual purposes as well. The study in the religious use of modern media is the study of the gradual change in religious practices over time. It is my hope that my examination of one form of religious media usage, Buddhist television in Taiwan, will contribute to this study of changing religious practices and that this study will continue in areas still to be explored in-depth in the Buddhist televisions and modern Buddhist media of other Buddhist traditions as well.

[301] Ibid., 639.

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